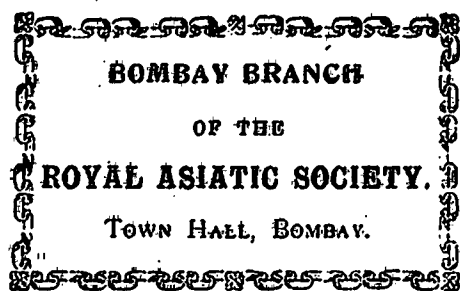




00110975



HORÆ HOMILETICÆ,

OR

DISCOURSES

(IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

UPON

The Whole Scriptures.

110975

BY

ol.

THE REV. C. SIMEON, M.A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. VII.



LONDON:

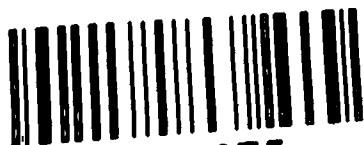
PRINTED BY RICHARD WATTS:

AND SOLD BY

CADELL AND DAVIES, STRAND; AND HATCHARD, PICCADILLY;
DEIGHTON AND SONS, AND NICHOLSON, CAMBRIDGE; PARKER, OXFORD;
BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND CUMMING, DUBLIN.

1820.

God
251
Sim/Hor
110975



00110975

CONTENTS.

VOL. VII.

Skeleton	Page
655. <i>The Wise Men seeking Christ</i>	1
656. <i>The Slaughter of the Infants</i>	4
657. <i>John's Address to those who came to be baptized of</i> <i>him</i>	10
658. <i>Baptism of the Spirit</i>	16
659. <i>The Call of Four Apostles</i>	20
660. <i>The Blessedness of the Humble</i>	25
661. <i>Christian Meekness</i>	30
662. <i>Hungering and Thirsting after Righteousness</i> .	35
663. <i>The Reward of Mercifulness</i>	39
664. <i>Purity of Heart</i>	43
665. <i>The Peace-makers</i>	50
666. <i>Persecution for Righteousness' Sake</i>	54
667. <i>Evangelic and Pharisaic Righteousness compared,</i>	59
668. <i>Christ's Exposition of the Sixth Commandment,</i>	75
669. <i>The Necessity of seeking Reconciliation with Men,</i>	81
670. <i>Christians the Salt of the Earth</i>	86
671. <i>Christians the Light of the World</i>	91
672. <i>The Law and the Prophets confirmed by Christ</i> .	96
673. <i>The Danger of Little Sins</i>	101
674. <i>The Importance of seeking Reconciliation with</i> <i>God</i>	105

Skeleton	Page
675. <i>Our Lord's Exposition of the Seventh Commandment</i>	110
676. <i>The Necessity of mortifying every Sin</i>	114
677. <i>Divorces forbidden</i>	120
678. <i>Swearing forbidden</i>	125
679. <i>Retaliation forbidden</i>	132
680. <i>Liberality enjoined</i>	137
681. <i>Love to Enemies enjoined</i>	143
682. <i>Christians do more than others</i>	148
683. <i>Directions respecting Alms-deeds</i>	156
684. <i>Directions respecting Prayer</i>	160
685. <i>Hallowing God's Name</i>	166
686. <i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	170
687. <i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	175
688. <i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	180
689. <i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	185
690. <i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	189
691. <i>A forgiving Spirit necessary to our Acceptance with God</i>	193
692. <i>Directions respecting Fasting</i>	200
693. <i>Laying up Treasures in Heaven</i>	204
694. <i>The Services of God and Mammon inconsistent .</i>	209
695. <i>Against Carefulness</i>	214
696. <i>Against Uncharitable Judging</i>	220
697. <i>Caution to be used in Reproving</i>	227
698. <i>The Importance and Efficacy of Prayer</i>	232
699. <i>The doing as we would be done unto</i>	238
700. <i>Men known by their Fruits</i>	247
701. <i>The Effect of our Lord's Preaching</i>	252
702. <i>How we are to follow Christ :</i>	258

Skeleton	Page
703. <i>Wisdom and Innocence to be united</i>	263
704. <i>Christ's Answer to John's Disciples</i>	269
705. <i>Christ's Commendation of John</i>	276
706. <i>The Necessity of a decided Adherence to Christ</i> .	281
707. <i>Christ's Regard to his obedient Followers</i> . . .	286
708. <i>Against Formality and Indifference</i>	292
709. <i>Peter's Confession of Christ rewarded</i>	297
710. <i>Peter's mistaken Tenderness reprov'd</i>	304
711. <i>Christ's Compassion and Man's Obstinacy con- trasted</i>	309
712. <i>Caution against Declension in Religion</i>	313
713. <i>The Day of Judgment</i>	317
714. <i>The Importance of Charitable Exertions</i>	323
715. <i>Christ's Apprehension</i>	329
716. <i>Christ forsaken by his Disciples</i>	333
717. <i>Our Lord's Condemnation by the Jewish Council,</i>	337
718. <i>The Indignities offered to Christ in the Palace of the High Priest</i>	342
719. <i>Impenitence</i>	346
720. <i>The Disposal of the Money paid to the Traitor Judas</i>	351
721. <i>Pilate's Protest</i>	354
722. <i>The Mocking of Christ upon the Cross</i>	359
723. <i>The Supernatural Darkness</i>	364
724. <i>The Signs attendant on our Lord's Death</i>	367
725. <i>The Guarding of the Sepulchre</i>	372
726. <i>The Scope of our Lord's Ministry</i>	377
727. <i>The Use and Benefit of the Sabbath</i>	382
728. <i>Christ's Love to his People</i>	388
729. <i>The Guilt and Danger of being ashamed of Christ,</i>	392

Skeleton	Page
730. <i>Christ blesses Little Children</i>	397
731. <i>The Rich Youth forsaking Christ</i>	402
732. <i>The Danger of Riches</i>	408
733. <i>The Reward of those who suffer for Christ</i> . .	415
734. <i>The Ambition of James and John reprov'd</i> . .	419
735. <i>Legitimate Ambition illustrated</i>	425
736. <i>The Importance of Faith in Prayer</i>	431
737. <i>The Regard due to Christ</i>	436
738. <i>The Resurrection proved from the Pentateuch</i> .	442
739. <i>Love to God the great Commandment</i>	447
740. <i>Love to our Neighbour</i>	451
741. <i>The Excellence of the Moral Law</i>	455
742. <i>The Widow's Mite</i>	460
743. <i>The Duty of Watchfulness enforced</i>	464
744. <i>We should watch for our Lord's Second Coming,</i>	468
745. <i>Commendation of Mary's Love</i>	471
746. <i>Peter's Denial of his Lord</i>	477
747. <i>Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene</i> . . .	480
748. <i>John the Forerunner of Jesus</i>	485
749. <i>The Angel's Message to Mary</i>	488
750. <i>The Virgin's Song of Praise</i>	493
751. <i>The Song of Zacharias</i>	497
752. <i>Christ's Incarnation glad Tidings to all</i> . . .	501
753. <i>Inquiry into the Gospel recommended</i>	506
754. <i>The Circumcision of Christ</i>	511
755. <i>Presentation of Christ in the Temple</i>	517
756. <i>Christ the Consolation of Israel</i>	522
757. <i>Testimony borne to Jesus in the Temple</i> . . .	527
758. <i>Ministry of John the Baptist</i>	532
759. <i>Liberality to the Poor</i>	538

Skeleton	Page
760. <i>Practical Duties enforced</i>	543
761. <i>The Imprisonment of John</i>	549
762. <i>The Descent of the Spirit upon Christ</i>	554
763. <i>Our Lord's First Sermon at Nazareth</i>	558
764. <i>The Call of Matthew</i>	563
765. <i>The Apostles chosen</i>	568
766. <i>Against mistaking our own Spirit</i>	572
767. <i>The Danger of rejecting the Gospel</i>	576
768. <i>The Enrolment of our Names in Heaven a Ground of Joy</i>	581
769. <i>The Gospel revealed to Babes</i>	587
770. <i>Martha and Mary's Character compared</i>	593
771. <i>Caution against Hypocrisy</i>	597
772. <i>God to be feared, but not Man</i>	603
773. <i>Caution against Covetousness</i>	609
774. <i>Repentance</i>	615
775. <i>Liberality to the Poor recommended</i>	623
776. <i>Angels rejoice over Penitents</i>	629
777. <i>The hopeless State of those who disregard the Scriptures</i>	633
778. <i>The Importance of Faith</i>	638
779. <i>Suddenness of Christ's Second Coming</i>	643
780. <i>Lot's Wife</i>	650
781. <i>Christ foretells his own Sufferings</i>	654
782. <i>The Conversion of Zaccheus</i>	661
783. <i>Encouragement to bear Persecution</i>	666
784. <i>Christ's Sufferings in the Garden</i>	670
785. <i>Our Lord's eating the Last Passover with his Disciples</i>	674
786. <i>The Treason of Judas</i>	680

[viii.]

Skeleton	Page
787. <i>Christ's Accusation before Pilate</i>	686
788. <i>Herod's Reconciliation with Pilate</i>	689
789. <i>Barabbas spared, and Christ condemned</i>	693
790. <i>Christ's Address to the Women who lamented him,</i>	697
791. <i>The Effect of Christ's Death on the Beholders</i> .	702
792. <i>The Necessity of Christ's Sufferings and Exal-</i> <i>tation</i>	707
793. <i>Blessedness of Communion with Christ</i>	712
794. <i>Christ's Resurrection</i>	718
795. <i>The Gospel to be first preached at Jerusalem</i> .	727
797. <i>The Ascension of Christ</i>	731



DCLV.

THE WISE MEN SEEKING CHRIST.

Matt. ii. 1, 2. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise-men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him.

THE humiliation of our blessed Lord was attended with many circumstances tending to counteract its influence on the minds of men. To see him born in a stable, and laid in a manger, was doubtless a stumbling-block in the way of many: but the sending of his forerunner, John the Baptist; the announcing of his birth by the voice of angels; the restoration of a spirit of prophecy after an interval of four hundred years; and the pointing him out to the Eastern Magi by a new-created star, were abundantly sufficient to remove the offence which his apparent meanness might occasion. This last event, the visit of the Magi to him, will occupy our attention at this time. We shall,

1. Make some general observations upon the visit—

That we may not go forward without some kind of order, we shall notice,

1. Who they were—

[The term by which they are designated, means Magicians.

cians. But we are not to understand by this, that they were persons practising enchantments ; we are rather to conceive of them as philosophers, who were attentive observers of nature, and (probably) proficient in astronomy. They came from the East ; but whether from Persia or Arabia, we cannot say. All that is affirmed of them more than this, is vain conjecture, or foolish superstition.]

2. How they came to think of the Lord Jesus Christ—

[God, who is sovereign in the distribution of his favours, chose them, as he did the shepherds, to be the objects of his peculiar favour. He sent a star, or meteor, to attract their attention ; and then revealed to them, that the star was intended to announce to them the birth of him who was to be the King of the Jews. Whether they had heard of Balaam's prophecy, (that a star should come out of Jacob, and a scéptre rise out of Israel,) we do not know^a : (the expectation of a Ruler to spring out of Israel, was certainly far extended through the world :) but, however the first conjecture might arise in the minds of the wise men, they could have known nothing certain but from revelation.]

3. What means they used in order to find him out—

[Being informed of the design of the star, they proceeded to visit this new-born King, and to pay him their profoundest homage. They pursued their journey to Jerusalem, and began to inquire, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" But they could hear nothing respecting him : their inquiries tended only to spread consternation through the whole city. Herod was alarmed, lest his throne should be endangered ; and the Jews were terrified, lest that suspicious and cruel tyrant should make this report an occasion of inflicting on them some heavy calamities. To get some light into the matter, Herod summoned a council of all the chief priests and scribes ; and inquired of them where Christ should be born. They readily informed him, from the prophecies, that Bethlehem was the place destined to that honour. This information being given to the wise-men, they instantly proceeded thither ; and, as soon as they went forth, the star, which had at first appeared to them in the east, became visible to them again, and went and "stood over the very house where the young child was." God withheld the miraculous appearance of the star when it was not necessary ; and renewed it only when it was wanted to confirm the faith of the wise-men, (which the indifference of the Jews might have

^a Num. xxiv. 17.

have caused to waver), and to point out infallibly the house where the child abode.]

4. How they conducted themselves towards him when they had found him—

[Filled with holy awe and reverence, they no sooner beheld him, than they prostrated themselves before him; and presented to him the offerings which they had brought with them for that purpose. It is possible, that their worship was only such as it was customary to pay to kings; and that their presents were only such as were the produce of their own country, without any thing mysterious in their import. Still, however, we read not of their paying any such regard to Herod; and therefore we may conclude, that at least they considered Jesus as excelling all other kings in dignity and glory.]

We shall now,

II. Call your particular attention to the wise-men—

They may be regarded by us in a three-fold view;

1. As witnesses to confirm our faith—

[Does the indifference of the Jews respecting their newborn King appear to weaken the evidence of his birth? Let us hear the testimony of the Magi respecting him: 'We beheld a new-formed star, and were instructed by Jehovah in the reason of its formation. We went to see the child whose birth it announced, and we saw him with our eyes, and paid to him the homage which was due from us. We know that we found the very child that was referred to, because that miraculous star pointed him out to us; and when we had honoured him to the best of our ability, Jehovah appeared to us again, revealed to us the purpose which Herod had conceived, and directed us to return to our own country without informing Herod, that so the parents of the child might have time to remove him to a land of safety.'

Must we not in all this acknowledge the hand of God? and would God thus set his seal to a falsehood, and thus countenance an impostor?]

2. As types to animate our hope—

[We are taught to believe that the day shall come, when all nations of the earth shall be converted to God, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought into the Church of Christ. The conversion of these wise men was, as it were, the first fruits, which assure to us the complete harvest. Does the event appear incredible? It was no difficulty to God to convince, and encourage them: nor will it be difficult with him to effect the universal change, whenever his time is come.

The

The same thing shall then take place on an extended scale^b; and “the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ.”]

3. As patterns to direct our conduct—

[Much may we learn from those heathen philosophers. *First*, let us learn to improve our studies or pursuits, whatever they may be, for our spiritual advantage. Do we behold strange phænomena in nature? Let them lead us to the God of nature: and whatever light we obtain from him, let us use it as the means of obtaining more light.

Next, let us not regard any scoffs, or difficulties, or dangers, that we may have to encounter in the way of our duty. Doubtless, the sages found many obstacles in their way; but they persisted to the end; and never ceased from their labour, till they had found Him whom they sought. Thus, let us resolutely seek the Lord Jesus, till we have found him. He is pointed out to us, not by a star, but by “the more sure word of the Gospel.” True enough, we may inquire after him of many who might well be expected to give us all needful information; and, after all, find them even more ignorant than ourselves. Our very solicitude about him may even provoke their enmity; but we must go on without weariness, and without fear; and still prosecute our inquiries after him, till we can say, “I have found Him whom my soul loveth.”

Lastly, having found Jesus, let us present to him all that we *are*, and all that we *have*. Let our body, soul, and spirit, be consecrated to him. Let us confess him as “King of kings, and Lord of lords;” let us devote to him our silver and our gold: and let us glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his. This is our reasonable service: and if we be backward to render it unto him, surely these heathen converts will rise up in judgment against us: for, if they so honoured him, when they saw him only as a babe, wrapt in swaddling-cloths, much more should we, who view him seated on his throne of glory.]

DCLVI.

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE INFANTS.

Matt. ii. 16, 18. *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise-men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise-men. Then was fulfilled*

^b Isai. lx. 5, 6.

fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

WHILST ungodly men are perpetrating every species of wickedness, the language of their hearts, as interpreted by God himself, is this: "The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth^a." A similar thought is apt to arise in the heart, when our trials are multiplied, and relief is not speedily afforded us. It was in this way that the Israelites at Massah, when destitute of water, vented their murmurs: this was their atheistical inquiry: "Is the Lord amongst us or not^b?" Even godly persons, under violent temptation, are sometimes ready to ask, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" But a diligent attention to the Scriptures will fortify us against any such absurd conclusions. From them we shall learn, that however inattentive God may *appear* to be to the concerns of men, he directs, limits, and overrules all their actions, for the promotion of his own glory. Scarcely on any occasion should we have expected his interposition, more than for the prevention of that murderous edict, whereby all the infants of Bethlehem and the adjacent country were destroyed. Yet God saw fit to permit it; and interfered no further than was necessary for the fulfilling of his own word, and the accomplishing of his own eternal purpose.

Let us contemplate,

I. The fact recorded—

A more strange occurrence can scarcely be conceived. We wonder that any human Being should be invested with such power, as to cause, by his own arbitrary mandate, the slaughter of so many innocent persons. We wonder still more, that, supposing this authority to be delegated to any one, there should

^a Ezek. viii. 12. & ix. 9.

^b Exod. vii. 7.

^c Ps. lxxvii. 9.

should be found agents to carry such an inhuman edict into execution. But most of all do we wonder, that a creature endued with reason should be capable of issuing such an order, as Herod did on this occasion. But let us trace this action to its source: let us inquire into *the principle from which this unparalleled barbarity proceeded*—

[The murderous purpose *originated in jealousy*. Herod possibly had heard of the birth of Jesus, previous to the arrival of the wise-men: but *that* was the circumstance which put him upon making inquiries into the pretensions of this new-born infant. From them he learned, that a star or meteor had appeared to them in the east, and that they, either from revelation or from the traditionary prophecy of Balaam, had been led to interpret the appearance of that star as an intimation, that He who was to reign over the Jews was now born into the world. He was also informed by them, that they had come on purpose to pay him the homage which was due to such an exalted character. Upon this, Herod summoned all the chief priests and scribes, that he might learn from them what the Prophets had declared respecting the place of their Messiah's nativity: and on understanding that Bethlehem was the place destined to that honour, he sent the wise-men thither, and ordered them, when they had found the child, to come and give him information respecting him. This order he grounded upon a pretended desire to honour Christ; but with a secret determination to destroy him: for he concluded, that Christ was to have a temporal dominion; and that, if suffered to live, he would wrest the kingdom out of his hands. But such a rival he could not endure: and hence arose the secret purpose to destroy him.

But though jealousy first prompted him to form the murderous purpose, with respect to his supposed rival, it was *offended pride* that caused it to be extended to all the children around Bethlehem. The wise-men, being warned by God of Herod's purpose, returned no more to him: at this Herod was indignant: he conceived himself slighted and despised; but he was determined not to be disappointed of his desire; and therefore, to secure his object, he gave orders that all infants near the age of Jesus, and within the neighbourhood of the place where he was born, should be massacred without distinction.

What an amazing ascendant must these principles have over the heart of man! Well may it be said, that "jealousy is cruel as the grave^d:" nor indeed is pride less cruel, when its

wounded

^d Cant. viii. 6.

wounded feelings have scope for exercise. This we see in the two sons of Jacob, who, on account of their sister having been defiled by the Prince of Shechem, slew every male in the city: and, when reproved for their cruelty, they shewed, in their vindication of themselves, from whence that cruelty had proceeded: "Should he deal with *our sister* as with an harlot?"

Happy would it have been for the world, if such dispositions and conduct had been altogether banished by the Gospel of Christ: but the human heart is the same in every age and place: we still see that the love of power is a predominant principle in the mind of man; that where it is suffered to gain an ascendancy, it will leave no means untried for the accomplishment of its ends; and that, if the more lenient methods of deceit and treachery will not succeed, it will wade through seas of blood to the attainment of its object: the cries of thousands and tens of thousands will not divert it from its purpose: nor will any thing but the utter extinction of a rival satisfy its blood-thirsty appetite^f.

We must not however forget, that the same evil principles are in our own hearts: and, if we will only call to mind the irritation which we have felt on some particular occasions, we shall see reason to be thankful to God, who has kept us from carrying into execution all that our offended pride might have prompted us to effect.]

Before we proceed to make any practical remarks upon this fact, it will be proper to notice,

II. The prophecy accomplished by it—

The New-Testament writers sometimes appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, as direct proofs of what they assert, and sometimes in a more lax way of accommodation only. It is in this latter way, we apprehend, that the prophecy before us is adduced^g. In its primary meaning, it represented the Jews as collected at Rama, for the purpose of being carried into captivity to Babylon^h; and Rachel (who had about 1100 years before been buried near that placeⁱ) as weeping over the disconsolate state of her posterity. The Evangelist beautifully applies the same figure to the slaughter of the children which

^g Gen. xxxiv. 31.

^f Written in Feb. 1809, when the British army had been forced to leave Spain under the merciless dominion of Buonaparte.

^h Jer. xxxi. 15—17.

ⁱ Jer. xl. 1.

^j Gen. xxxv. 19.

which took place at Bethlehem, which also was near to Rachel's tomb; and, in this view, he speaks of the prophecy as again accomplished. This he might well do: for who can conceive the distress which that event occasioned?

[The murderous bands could not stop to see, whether, in every instance, the wounds they had inflicted had actually destroyed life: they must proceed rapidly in their work, lest any of the children should be carried off or concealed: and what anguish must the cries of so many children, (probably some thousands,) writhing in the agonies of death, in agonies protracted by the kind solicitude of their parents, have produced in the bosoms of their bereaved mothers! No language can paint, no imagination conceive, the horrors of that day. We may use the terms, "lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning;" but we cannot affix to them any adequate ideas, or realize, in any just degree, that awful scene———]

We cannot but SEE from hence,

1. How early our Lord's sufferings began—

[Scarcely was he born, before his life was sought, and he was forced to be carried an exile to the country which of all others had been most hostile to his progenitors. And, after the death of Herod, he was forced, for his security, to take up his abode in a town which fixed a stigma upon him to his latest hour^k. These were, indeed, only "the beginnings of his sorrows:" but they may well reconcile his followers to any privations or reproaches which they may be called to endure for his sake. If for us he became "a man of sorrows, and afflicted with grief," let us cheerfully bear our cross for him, and willingly "suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together"———]

2. How vain are any attempts of man to counteract the designs of God—

[Herod foolishly thought to defeat the purposes of heaven; but "God held him in derision, and laughed him to scorn!" God knew his murderous plans, and warned the parents of our Lord to escape his fury; yea, and provided too for their journey and support in Egypt, by the offerings which the wise-men had just before presented to the newborn King. Herod, to secure his purpose, ordered, not the children of Bethlehem only, but of all the neighbouring country; and not of one year old only, but all under two years old, to be

^k John i. 46. & vii. 52.

^l Ps. ii. 1—6.

be massacred: but his attempts were vain; and instead of frustrating the designs of Heaven, he unwittingly fulfilled them; occasioning, by this very act, no less than three prophecies to be accomplished^m. Thus it is with all who set themselves against God: they may shew their malignity, but they cannot counteract his gracious designs. "Many are the devices in men's hearts; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall standⁿ." "The wrath of man, (as far as it is permitted to be exercised,) shall praise him; and the remainder of that wrath shall he restrain^o." We never need, therefore, to be afraid of man; for, if we commit our way unto the Lord, "he will be our shield and buckler;" and, "if He be for us," we may triumphantly ask, "Who can be against us?"]

3. How certainly will there be a day of future retribution—

[Can it be, that such an inhuman monster should never meet with any just recompence for his deeds? The mind revolts at the idea. If there be a God that governs the world, there must be a period when the present inequalities of his government shall be done away, and the equity of his dispensations be made apparent. Hence the day of judgment is in Scripture called, "The day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God^p:" and we are told, that "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble us; and to us who are troubled, rest^r." Let us then act in reference to that day: whether exalted and at ease, or depressed and persecuted, let us look to that day, when our happiness or misery shall be for ever fixed. Let us dread prosperity, if it divert our attention from a future state; and let us welcome adversity, if it be the means of bringing us nearer unto God. The infants now have no cause to regret that they were called to such early martyrdom: and it is highly probable, that many of their parents have since found reason to give thanks to God for the weight of sorrow that then oppressed them. But the proud oppressor,—who can reflect on his state without shuddering? how will he feel, when he shall stand at the tribunal of that very Jesus, whom with such hypocrisy and cruelty he laboured to destroy? O that, whenever tempted to sin, we may think of the account which *we* must one day give; and, whenever called to suffer, may "look with Moses to the recompence of the reward!"]

^m ver. 15, 17, 23.—He still further confirmed the Messiahship of Jesus, by leading all the Jewish Sanhedrim to declare, that Bethlehem was to be the place of his nativity, v. 4—6.

ⁿ Prov. xix. 21.

^o Ps. lxxvi. 10.

^p Rom. viii. 31.

^r Rom. ii. 5.

^r 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

DCLVII.

JOHN'S ADDRESS TO THOSE WHO CAME TO BE
BAPTIZED OF HIM.

Matt. iii. 7—10. *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

WHEN a profession of religion is become fashionable, as it were, and common, it is necessary for Ministers to be doubly careful that they do not sanction, much less promote, the delusions of hypocrites or impostors. At such seasons, peculiar faithfulness and discrimination will be wanted, that the upright may not be discountenanced, nor the vain pretenders to piety be encouraged.

The Baptist was signally successful in his ministrations, insomuch that Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went to be baptized of him. Amongst this great multitude came many Pharisees and Sadducees, desiring to be numbered amongst his disciples. At this he was utterly astonished; because the Pharisees were so conceited of their own goodness as to think that they needed no better religion; and the Sadducees, the free-thinkers of the day, despised religion altogether. He would not immediately reject them, but, in a most faithful and energetic address, declared what they must be, if they would obtain happiness in the future world. He called them “a generation of vipers,” because of the poisonous and infectious nature of their principles, and the manifest relation which, both in sentiment and conduct, they bare to
the

the old serpent the devil^a. Such an address became him as a prophet^b; but it would not be suited to us who bear an inferior commission. Nevertheless the same fidelity should be found in all: and what he spake to them, we must declare to you; namely, that,

I. True religion must be judged of by its fruits—

As this is the only criterion whereby the excellence of a tree can be known, so is it the only true test of religion. There are “fruits meet for repentance;” fruits that manifest its existence, and denote its power. Let us inquire what they are: and, as they will be found in every part of our conduct, let us examine them in reference to,

1. God—

[It will certainly shew itself in high thoughts of God's unbounded goodness and mercy; in deep humiliation of our souls before him; in a joyful acceptance of his proffered salvation; and in love, ardent love, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us; together with a simple reliance on his atoning sacrifice. It will stimulate the soul to fervent prayer for the continued influences of God's Holy Spirit, and to a surrender of the soul, with all its faculties and powers, to his service. It will make the pleasing of God to be henceforth the great object of our lives; and will moderate all our regards to the creature, insomuch that, though we are *in* the world, we shall not be *of* it; and, though “we use it, we shall not abuse it.”]

2. Our neighbour—

[Repentance extends not to the sins of the first table only, but to those of the second table also. It will give a new principle to us in all our dealings with mankind. We shall be strictly just and honest in all our transactions, doing to others precisely as in a change of circumstances we should think it right for them to do to us. If a man be our superior, we shall be ready to pay him, for God's sake, all that respect and obedience which the laws of God or man enjoin. If he be our inferior, we shall act towards him with all kindness and condescension, all tenderness and love. Whatever be his state and condition, we shall be cautious of grieving him by word or deed; we shall applaud his virtues, conceal his faults, and ex-

ercise

^a John viii. 44.

^b Such were delivered by other prophets, Isai. i. 10; and by Christ himself, Matt. xxiii. 33.

ercise towards him that forbearance and forgiveness which we ourselves desire to meet with at the hands of God. It will be the joy of our hearts to alleviate his troubles, to supply his necessities, and to seek his welfare, not only as well as, but even *in preference to*, our own ^c.]

3. Ourselves—

[The office of repentance in regulating the secret dispositions of our hearts, is by no means sufficiently considered: but, if it extend not to these, it is not genuine, nor will it ever prove “a repentance to salvation.” In the natural and unrenewed heart, pride, envy, malice, wrath, discontent, uncleanness, lasciviousness, and many other hateful evils, are harboured, even where the external and visible exercise of them is restrained. ‘But the true penitent “puts away all these,” and cultivates a spirit of meekness and gentleness, of love and kindness, of patience and thankfulness; and endeavours to guard against an impure thought or desire, no less than against the most criminal indulgence.

I do not say, that a penitent so attains all these graces as never to betray his weakness; but this I say, that these are the fruits of the spirit which every penitent will produce ^d; that they necessarily arise out of godly sorrow ^e; and that every sincere penitent will advance in these attainments, so that they who are most conversant with him shall be constrained to bear testimony to the progressive amelioration of all his tempers.

O that there might be in all of us such an heart; and that all who profess repentance might thus make their profiting to appear!]

It is of infinite importance to ascertain in this way whether our religion be genuine; for,

II. Without it, all hopes of salvation are delusive—

The Jews were apt to found their hopes of mercy on their relation to Abraham—

[Many of them had a strange conceit that no child of Abraham could perish: and it is probable that they built that notion on the promise of God never to cast off *the seed* of Abraham ^f. They had no idea that there was such a thing as a *spiritual* seed; and therefore they limited the promise to his descendants according to the flesh, and included all of them without any regard to their moral character. Against this erroneous notion the Baptist cautioned those whom he

now

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7. Phil. ii. 4. 1 Cor. x. 24.

^d Gal. v. 22, 23. ^e 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. ^f Jer. xxxi. 35—37.

now addressed; and told them, that God would rather raise up a posterity to Abraham out of the very stones, (or perhaps from among the Gentile soldiers, many of whom might be present with them on that occasion,) than either suffer his promise to fail, or admit impenitent sinners to heaven.]

And similar to this are the delusions which obtain amongst us—

[Because men have been born of Christian parents, and educated in a Christian land, and have never formally renounced Christianity, they imagine that they are Christians, notwithstanding they have never cordially embraced the doctrines of Christianity, nor obeyed its precepts. They have the same reason for being Christians that Mahometans have for being Mahometans, and no better. They have never seen the suitableness of Christianity to their wants, nor the sufficiency of it for their necessities: nor have they been concerned about it, any further than just to observe its outward forms. Yet on this the generality found their hopes of heaven. Whether they will express it in words or not, it is that which they “think to say *within themselves*.” But we must remind all such persons of the declaration of St. Paul, “that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of Gods.” It is not any external profession that will avail us in the day of judgment: we may have the sublimest knowledge, the strongest faith, the most ardent zeal, and the most unbounded liberality, and yet perish at last for want of that principle of love, which is the source and summit of all vital godliness^h. O that we may never deceive our own souls, or rest in any thing short of “pure, practical, and undefiled religion!”]

Such indifference about true religion would not long exist, if men would but reflect, that,

III. There is a time shortly coming, when the want of it will be attended with the most bitter consequences.

God had determined to punish the Jewish nation for their unfruitfulness—

[Long had he waited to see whether the vines he had cultivated with so much care, would bring forth fruit: but they brought

^f Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^h 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

brought forth none but wild grapes : and therefore, though he had spared them long at the intercession of the vine-dresser, he determined speedily to cut them down, that they might cumber the ground no longer. Of this the Baptist warned his audience : he assured them, that God was ready to execute his purpose ; that “ the axe was even now *lying at* their roots ;” and that nothing but immediate and true repentance could avert their doom.]

The same awful judgment awaits every unfruitful soul—

[An unfruitful tree stands unconscious of the destiny that awaits it : but they who see the preparations made for cutting it down, anticipate its fate. Thus, if impenitent transgressors had eyes to see, they might see the axe lying at their root, and God giving his orders to him that is to use it. Disease or accident are just tarrying awhile, but coming at the appointed moment, to execute their commission.

And here let it be remembered, that it is not a mere negative goodness that will obtain a respite. It is not said, that every tree which brings forth *peculiarly bad* fruit, shall be cut down ; but every tree which bringeth not forth *good* fruit. There must be such fruits as we have before spoken of ; such as characterize a converted state ; such as are “ meet for” and “ worthy of” true repentance. As the “ unprofitable servant” is numbered with those who are positively “ wicked,” so the unfruitful tree will receive the same doom as that which is laden with the most pernicious fruits. And happy would it be for such professors of religion, if they had only temporal judgments to expect : but there remains for them a fire, after they are cut down ; a fire into which they will be cast, and which, though incessantly consuming them, will never be extinguished.]

ADDRESS,

1. Guard against delusive expectations—

[Every person, whatever may have been his life, hopes to be happy in a future world. The vanity of such hopes is in many cases so manifest, that we cannot but pity the self-deluding people who cherish them. Yet, though we can see the delusions of others, we cannot see our own : we all hope, that *our own* state is safe : “ a deceived heart turns us aside, so that we cannot deliver our souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand ?” The Pharisees had a high conceit of their own comparative sanctity, as the Sadducees had of their superior wisdom : and though each condemned the other, neither

would

would condemn themselves. But John saw that neither the one nor the other would ultimately attain salvation, unless they experienced an entire change both of heart and life. They however would not believe him, and therefore rejected the counsel of God, which the more humble publicans thankfully embraced*. Let me guard you then against their mistakes; and intreat you all, however wise or good you may conceive yourselves to be, to entertain a godly jealousy respecting your state: and be fearful, lest by building your hopes upon the sand, you then begin to find your error when it is beyond a remedy.]

2. Be thankful to those who will shew you your true character—

[Those Ministers who commend themselves most faithfully to your consciences, deserve your thanks. Many are the reproaches which they bear on account of their fidelity; but a hope of benefiting your souls emboldens them to proceed; and they account themselves richly recompensed, when they see you bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. Do not then be angry with them for speaking plainly and pointedly, as the Pharisees were when they saw that our Lord had spoken a parable against them¹; but rather take occasion, from what they say, to search and examine your own hearts with sincerity and diligence, desiring and determining, with God's help, to know the worst of yourselves.

You will do well also to encourage your friends to communicate to you freely what they see amiss. You cannot but know, that if a skilful lawyer were to point out to you a flaw in the title of an estate which you were about to purchase, you would feel greatly indebted to him: and why? Because you would save your *money*. And will you not be thankful to one who by his counsel endeavours to save your *soul*? Alas! alas! to flatterers we can listen without weariness; but to a faithful monitor we can scarcely for a few minutes lend an ear: what the one says is received gladly, even though we have every reason to believe that he goes beyond the truth; but what the other says, calls forth all our ingenuity to weaken its force, though we know every syllable of it to be true. Beloved, be on your guard against this self-love: you may easily deceive yourselves, but you cannot deceive your God.]

3. Let nothing retard you in fleeing from the wrath to come—

[There is no room to ask, "Who hath warned you?" for I have warned you; and God has warned you; and, I hope,
your

* Luke vii. 29, 30.

¹ ib. xx. 19.

your own consciences have warned you : or, if none of these have spoken yet so as to attract your attention, I now warn you, with all plainness and faithfulness, to “ flee from the wrath to come.” Consider whose wrath it is : it is the wrath of Almighty God. Consider the description given of it : it is, and ever will be, the wrath *to come* : yes, many millions of years hence, it will be no nearer its termination than at this moment : to all eternity it will be the same, The wrath *to come*. Can you reflect on the greatness and duration of this wrath, and not be in earnest in fleeing from it ? What other work can you have to do, that is of the least importance when compared with this ? Would the man-slayer loiter, when he saw the pursuer of blood just ready to overtake him ? Do *ye* then use all diligence : leave nothing till to-morrow that can be done to day. I would lay hold of your hand, as the angels did of Lot’s and his daughters’, and hasten your steps. Stop not even to look behind you ; but “ what your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might.” The Saviour is ready to receive you : he will cast out none that come unto him : and the express promise of your God is this, “ Repent, and turn from all your transgressions ; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”]

^m Ezek. xviii. 30.

DCLVIII.

BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT.

Matt. iii. 11. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance : but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.*

THE office of John the Baptist was, to prepare a people for the Lord, and to pave the way, as it were, for the readier admission of the Messiah. Accordingly the great scope of his ministry was to direct men to that Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world : and when he saw them ready to look up to himself as the Messiah, he guarded them in the strongest terms against entertaining wrong notions of himself, and laboured the more abundantly to exalt his divine Master. In the words before us he declares, that the illustrious personage, whose advent he proclaimed, would bestow upon

upon them blessings, of which his ministry was but a faint type or shadow: and thus, turning their eyes from himself to Christ, he leads them to contemplate,

I. The dignity of the Giver—

Though John was himself a very distinguished person, Christ was incomparably greater—

[John had indeed been the subject of prophecy many hundred years before he came into the world^a. He was formed in the womb by a *preter-natural* agency, announced to his parents by a messenger from heaven. At his birth, the gift of prophecy, which for three or four centuries had been withheld, was restored to the Church. He was sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb: and he had a testimony, even from our Lord himself, that he was more than a prophet, yea, greater than any that had ever been born of woman. Yet this exalted person was not even worthy to perform the lowest office imaginable for Him whose harbinger he was. What an idea does this give us of the dignity of Christ!]

Moreover, as Christ was so superior to him in his person, so was he also in his office—

[John only baptized his converts with water, in token that they professed to repent, and engaged to believe on the Messiah, who was about to appear^b. This sprinkling of water was of no real use, unless it was accompanied with a divine energy: it entailed obligations, but communicated no blessings^c. But the Lord Jesus was sent to “baptize with the Holy Ghost.” Now the Holy Ghost is the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, God, equal with the Father and the Son^d. Yet was Christ empowered to send even HIM into the hearts of men, and to quicken whomsoever he would by the operations of that Almighty Agent^e. Could He then himself be any other than God, God over all blessed for evermore^f? It is in this light we should view the Saviour; and “honour him even as we honour the Father.”]

We shall have yet a further knowledge of his glory, if we consider,

II.

^a Mal. iv. 5. Matt. xi. 14.

^c Acts viii. 13, 21.

^e John vii. 38, 39. & xv. 26. & v. 21.

^b Acts xix. 4.

^d See Acts v. 3, 4.

^f Rom. ix. 5.

II. The excellency of the gift—

Having spoken of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, we shall confine our attention now to his operations. He is promised to us here under the images,

1. Of water—

[As in baptism the water washed away the filth of the flesh, so the Holy Spirit, who was represented by the water, washes away the pollutions of the soul. In this view the Spirit was long before promised to the Church; “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” It should seem, indeed, by our Lord’s reference to this testimony of John, that the promise of the Spirit referred only to the day of Pentecost, and to the miraculous gifts that were then bestowed: but, from a subsequent explanation of our Lord’s words, it is evident that this promise extended to the Gentile world, and had its accomplishment when Cornelius and his household were converted^b. The Gentile converts in after ages were said to be “saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which God had shed on them abundantly through Jesus Christⁱ.”]

2. Of fire—

[As water cleanses from external defilements, so fire purges away the dross that is mixed with any metallic substance. It is probable that, in using this image, St. John referred to the prophecy of the Messiah, wherein it is said “that he should be as a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap; and should sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, to purify the sons of Levi^k.” Now nothing can withstand the action of the fire; it dissolves the hardest metal, and consumes its dross. Thus neither can the most obdurate heart withstand the influences of the Spirit, when he exerts his almighty energy to dissolve and purify it.

And now how excellent a gift is this! a gift bestowed on the rebellious, and promised to us and to our children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call^l! Let us only conceive our polluted hearts purged by it from their corruptions, and transformed into the very image of God, and we shall have cause to exclaim with wonder and gratitude, Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. How

^g Ezek. xxxvi. 25.—27. ^h Compare Acts i. 5. with xi. 14.—16.

ⁱ Tit. iii. 5, 6.

^k Mal. iii. 2, 3.

^l Acts ii. 38, 39.

1. How to know whether we be Christians indeed—

[We are denominated Christians from our professing in baptism to become the followers of Christ: but the mere rite of baptism, however excellent and necessary as an appointment of God, can never constitute us true Christians. It can of itself no more raise a dead soul to life, than the laying of Elisha's staff upon the face of the dead child could reanimate his breathless corpse^m. We must have that baptism of the Spirit, which purifies us both from outward and inward corruption, or else we only delude ourselves with a mere fruitless and ineffectual profession. Let us then look to Him who is empowered to send down the Spirit into our hearts; and may He now breathe on us, as on his Disciples of old, and say, Receive ye the Holy Ghostⁿ!]

2. What dispositions we must cultivate, if we either have received, or would receive, the gift of the Holy Ghost—

[St. John was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb. Yet, notwithstanding his eminent sanctity, and the high office that he filled, he could find no terms sufficiently humiliating, wherein to express his own unworthiness. Thus the more holy we are, the more exalted thoughts shall we have of Christ, and the more abasing thoughts of ourselves. Moreover, this disposition of mind tends to prepare us for the reception of this heavenly gift. 'With whom will "God dwell, but with the humble and contrite?" When did the Spirit descend on the first converts, but when they were crying, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Be persuaded, then, of your need of the Spirit. Beg the Lord Jesus to baptize you with it. Plead with him that promise, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour *my Spirit* upon thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring^o." Submit your souls to the Spirit's influence, that he may "purely purge away your dross, and take away all your tin^p:" so shall you be meet to serve your Lord on earth, and to enjoy him in heaven for evermore.]

^m 2 Kings iv. 29—31.

^o Isai. xlv. 3.

ⁿ John xx. 22.

^p Isai. i. 25.

DCLIX.

THE CALL OF FOUR APOSTLES.

Matt. iv. 18—22. And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets: and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

IT has pleased God on many occasions to give marks of his special approbation to persons while they were employed in their worldly callings. David was taken from his father's sheep-folds, when he was appointed to feed and govern the kingdom of Israel. The shepherds were watching over their flocks by night, when a choir of angels announced to them the Messiah's birth. And four of the Apostles were occupied in spreading, or in mending their nets, when the Lord Jesus selected them for his stated and most intimate attendants. We do not mean to say, that a discharge of earthly duties can *merit* any thing at the hand of God, or that he will have respect to it in that view: but certainly, to fulfil the duties of our respective stations is a service highly pleasing and acceptable unto God; nor are we ever more likely to receive blessings from God, than when we are occupied in performing the offices which he himself has assigned us.

But it is not so much to the season when these Apostles were called, as to the call itself, that we now propose to direct your attention. For this end let us inquire,

I. How far the call given to them is applicable to us—

We must consider our Lord's address to them as relating, in part, to the high office to which he had destined them as his Apostles. The world at large were

were not called to renounce their worldly occupations, and become itinerant Ministers of the word: on the contrary, the great body of Christians were repeatedly bidden to “abide in the calling wherein they were called,” yea, “to abide therein with God.” Thus far, therefore, the command given to them is not properly applicable to us. But, in part, the command referred to their general duty as Christians: and in that sense it is given to every one to whom the Gospel itself is sent. We may consider our Lord as at this moment addressing us, and requiring us,

1. To embrace his religion—

[We cannot follow Christ one single step, without first coming to him as the Saviour of the world. We must regard him as the true Messiah; we must view him as invested with all power in heaven and in earth, that he might redeem us to God by his blood, and deliver us by his almighty grace. We must consider him as having all fulness treasured up in him for us, that we may receive out of it, according to our respective necessities, “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” It is not merely to *give an assent* to certain truths that we are called, but to *realize* them, and to *live upon* them. We must not merely acknowledge that Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and that “he has reconciled us to God by his blood,” but we must determine, with the Apostle, to know nothing but Christ crucified, to trust in nothing but his righteousness, and to glory in nothing but his cross — — —]

2. To walk in his steps—

[Next to our believing in him is that obedience which we are to render to his commandments. If faith in him is the root, obedience to him is the fruit, which must immediately, and with increasing abundance, proceed from it. Our blessed Lord came, not only to save us by his meritorious death and passion, but to “set us an example that we should follow his steps.” To follow him, therefore, we must “walk as he walked.” Behold his zeal for the glory of his God and Father; it even “consumed him,” so ardently did it burn within him: such should be our zeal also; it should be “our meat and drink to do our Father’s will.” Behold his humility^a, his self-denial^b, his meekness^c, his patience^d, his compassion,

^a John xiii. 4, 5, 15.

^b Phil. ii. 5—8.

^c John xviii. 23.

^d Isai. l. 6, & liii. 7, & 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

compassion^e, his love^f: in all of these we are to resemble him; and to be progressively “changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God”— — — O that all who profess themselves his followers were more like Him in the whole of his spirit and temper! It is this that marks the Christian: all without this is hypocrisy and delusion—]

3. To devote ourselves openly to his service—

[It is well to be Christians in our secret chamber: but we must remember, that “our light is also to shine before men.” We must confess Christ before men: and if we are ashamed or afraid to do so, we cannot be his disciples. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” His name, his cause, his people are despised by an ungodly world: and we must share in their contempt: we must “follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” There is no occasion to affect singularity in trivial matters; (THAT should rather be avoided:) there are points enough of importance in which we must be singular; we cannot resemble him without being singular; because the ungodly world are as opposite to him as darkness is to light: of course, therefore, we must be “as lights in a dark place, as cities set upon a hill.” Nay, we are not to be contented with “abstaining from fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; we are actively and boldly to reprove them;” and must shew ourselves on the Lord’s side; endeavouring to maintain his honour, and to advance his interests in the world — — —]

These are points of universal and unalterable importance: and *we* are required to follow Christ in these respects, no less than the Apostles themselves. *This* call, I say, is given equally to us; and it becomes us all to inquire,

II. In what manner we should obey it—

We need only notice the conduct of these holy Apostles, and we shall be at no loss how to regulate our own. The command itself is plain; and we must obey it,

1. Instantly, without delay—

[We see not the smallest hesitation in any one of those whom Jesus called, in our text. Elsewhere we find that one expressed a wish “to go first and bid farewell” to his friends; and another desired to “go first and bury his father^g.” But there is no time for compliment on an occasion like this. The call

^e Luke xix. 41.

^f Eph. v. 1, 2.

^g Luke ix. 59—61.

call of God is of paramount obligation: nothing is for a moment to interfere with our obedience to it. We know not but that it may be the last call we ever shall receive. The persons invited to the marriage supper wished to excuse themselves for that time; but they were never invited again: on the contrary, the founder of the feast resolved, that "no one of them should ever taste of his supper^h." A similar resolution may at this very moment be formed by the Lord Jesus Christ, if we now refuse to become his followers, "His Spirit will not always strive with man." There is "a day when the things which belong to our peace may be for ever hid from our eyes;" and our "God may swear in his wrath, that we shall never enter into his rest." O that that day may never come with respect to us! O that we may not foolishly dream of "a more convenient season," which shall never arrive! But let us "to-day, while it is called to-day," comply with this divine call. Let us imitate the man after God's own heart, whose experience is recorded in those memorable words, "I made haste, and delayed not, to keep thy commandments."]

2. Fully, without reserve—

[Whilst some are wishing to defer their compliance with this command, others make exceptions against it, in some particulars, and would gladly have it lowered to their taste and convenience. Thus it was with the rich youth, who, when required to "sell all and give it to the poor, and to look for his treasure in heaven," accounted it a hard saying, and parted with Christ and heaven rather than with his wealth. "One thing he lacked;" and that one thing as effectually ruined him, as ten thousand would have done. O that we may learn from his fate, not to make any exceptions or reserves; but to "follow the Lord fully," even as Caleb and as Joshua did! It was a great trial to Peter and Andrew to leave their nets; and to James and John to leave their father also: but the grace of Christ was sufficient for them; and they willingly forsook all for him. Thus must we do: we must give a preferenceⁱ, a strong and decisive preference^k, to Christ, above all earthly relatives, or worldly possessions. We cannot now be called to *act as* Levi did; but the zeal of Levi must be in us^l, and all things, not excepting parents or life itself, must be hated in comparison of Christ^m. We are plainly warned respecting the terms on which alone our Lord will consider us as hisⁿ; and

we

^h Luke xiv. 18, 24.

ⁱ Matt. x. 37, 38.

^k Luke xiv. 25-27, 33.

^l Deut. xxxiii. 9, 10.

^m Matt. xvi. 24, 25.

ⁿ Acts xx. 24. & xxi. 13.

we must “count the cost,” gladly parting with every thing, that we may obtain “the pearl of great price.”]

3. Perseveringly, without end—

[Religion is not for a day or a year, but for the whole of our lives. “Our hands being once put to the plough, we must look back no more.” God warns us, that, “if we draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in us.” “It is he who endures to the end, and he only, that shall be saved” at last. As for a temporary obedience to this command, it would be worse than a continued opposition to it: “It were better not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to depart from it.” “The latter end of an Apostate is worse than his beginning.” We are particularly told to “remember Lot’s wife,” who was made an everlasting monument of his vengeance, not for *going* back to Sodom, but for *looking* back, and thereby shewing, that her heart was yet cleaving to the things which she had left behind. Happy will it be for us if we bear her in mind, and consider the danger of departing even in heart from the Lord — — — If our trials be multiplied, we must cry the more earnestly to God for help, that through his all-sufficient grace we may say with David, “All this has come upon us; yet is not our heart turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way.”]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who think that such obedience is impracticable—

[See how powerfully the word of Christ wrought on them — — — It is no less powerful now — — — Pray that it may come to your hearts in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.]

2. Those who are hesitating whether to obey or not—

[If it appear formidable to you to *follow* Christ now, think what it will be to be bidden to *depart from* him hereafter — — — That you will meet with trials is certain: but your losses shall be repaid an hundredfold *in this life*, besides a proportionable weight of glory in the world to come^p. Thousands can attest the truth of this — — — O choose the better part, which shall never be taken away from you!]

3. Those who are engaged in following the Lord—

[Though you may not be called, *as preachers*, to be
“fishers

^c Ps. xliv. 17—19. & cxix. 51, 157.

^p Mark x. 28—30.

“fishers of men,” yet in your several stations God will make you instrumental to the salvation of men. A holy life will operate on many who would never have been wrought upon by the preached word^a. None prove such stumbling-blocks as you, if your lives be unsuitable to your profession, and none such blessings, if you walk worthy of your high calling——— “Seek therefore more and more to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things^b.”]

^a 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2. ^b Matt. v. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15.

DCLX.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE HUMBLE.

Matt. v. 1—4. *And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his Disciples came unto him. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

THERE is no portion of the holy Scriptures for which mankind at large express so great a reverence, as that which is called the Sermon on the Mount. Some exalt it in opposition to the rest of the sacred volume, and affirm, that we need not attend to any other part. This is certainly wrong, since every part of that blessed book is given by inspiration from God. On the other hand, there are some who would get rid of it altogether, by supposing that it was addressed to the Apostles only, and that common Christians have nothing to do with it. But these also do greatly err: for, not to mention that the Apostles were not yet chosen from among the Disciples; the very declaration of St. Matthew, at the end of this discourse, shews that it was spoken to all the people^a. The multitudes being too numerous to be accommodated in any house or synagogue, our Lord went up into a mountain, and sat down, after the custom of the Jewish teachers, in order to instruct them. Those Disciples who were most eager for instruction, drew nigh unto him; whilst those who were more indifferent about it, contented

^a Matt. vii. 28.

contented themselves with remoter situations: but, for the benefit of all, “he opened his mouth” with peculiar solemnity, and taught them.

His design in this Sermon, was to open to them the nature of that kingdom which he had before announced as about to be established, and to rescue the moral law from those false glosses which the Pharisees had put upon it. The people in general had an idea, that their Messiah should establish a temporal kingdom, under which they were to enjoy the highest privileges and blessings. To counteract this vain expectation, he tells them, that his subjects would be indeed most blessed; but that their character and blessedness were widely different from any thing that they supposed. They dreamed of riches and mirth; but the persons whom he pronounced blessed, were the poor and mournful.

To illustrate and confirm the declarations of our Lord, we shall inquire,

I. Who are depicted under these characters—

[Poverty of spirit, if viewed in all its extent, will include a variety of dispositions and feelings, which will more properly fall under our consideration in other parts of the Sermon on the Mount. On this account, we shall confine ourselves to one view of it, which, however, we consider as most appropriate and most important. It is thought by many, to import a disregard of riches and honours: but we consider it as designating a far more peculiar state of mind, not specified in any other part of this discourse^b. What poverty is, we need not be told. That man is poor who is destitute of all things needful for the body. From hence we may collect what poverty of spirit is: it is *a sense of utter want and helplessness in relation to the soul*.

All men by nature are poor, because they are destitute of every thing that is good — — — But many who are in this state, are far enough from poverty of spirit: they think they are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” — — — When they are become poor in spirit they are of a very different mind; they know that “they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

^b The parallel passage in Luke vi. 20, 21, 24, 25. cannot be understood of worldly poverty or sorrow, but of that which is spiritual.

naked." They feel themselves altogether destitute of wisdom^c— — — goodness^d— — — strength^e— — — and every good thing^f— — —

Nearly allied to these are "they that mourn." As poverty of spirit implies a sense of want and helplessness, so "mourning" implies *a sense of guilt and corruption*.

All men are guilty, and all corrupt— — —but, as in the former case, so in this, many are insensible of their state, and "think more highly of themselves than they ought to think." Not so "the mourners in Zion:" they know their real character: they look back through their whole lives, and see that they have been altogether "alienated from God," and have "lived without him in the world." They see that their transgressions have been multiplied beyond the sands upon the sea-shore. They behold their iniquities set, as it were, in array against them; their rebellions against their God and Father— — —their contempt of Christ and his salvation^g— — —their resistance to all the motions of the Holy Spirit— — —the particular evils to which they have been more especially addicted— — —the evils that yet cleave to them, in spite of their better judgment, and repeated endeavours to cast them off— — —the mixture that there is in all their principles—the defect in all their duties—and the iniquity even of their holiest actions—and, in the view of all these things, "they groan, being burthened;" they "blush and are confounded;" they "abhor themselves in dust and ashes;" they cry, day and night, "O wretched man, that I am! who shall deliver me?" It appears to them a miracle of mercy, that they are out of hell; and *that too*, not only for the transgressions of their former lives, but for the opposition which their flesh, or corrupt nature, is daily and hourly making to "the spirit," or heavenly principle, which has been imparted to them^h.

These two characters, "the poor in spirit," and "the mourners," though distinguished in the text, are so nearly allied, that they are united by the prophet Isaiah^h, and therefore are united by us. In fact, they are never separate: they always participate in each other's feelings, and always are subjects of the same blessedness.

Let us, in the next place, inquire,]

II. In what their blessedness consists—

Doubtless, to carnal eyes, there is little in such characters

^c Job viii. 9. & xi. 12. They feel their want of spiritual discernment, 1 Cor. ii. 14. and pray, Ps. cxix. 18.

^d Job xl. 4. Isai. vi. 5. & lxiv. 6.

^e John xv. 5. 1 Cor. xii. 3. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^f Rom. vii. 18. Isai. i. 6. ^g Isa. lxvi. 2. ^h Gal. v. 17

characters that can render them objects of envy : to a superficial observer, they appear rather to be in a most melancholy and pitiable condition. But they are truly blessed :

1. Their privileges are great—

[“ The kingdom of heaven is theirs,” even that kingdom which Christ has established in the world, and maintains in the hearts of men. The blessings of that kingdom are precisely such as they want ; and they are in the very state to which all those blessings are promised. The Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world, in order to seek and save them that were lost. In him is treasured up all that they can desire. “ He is wisdom” to the blind, “ righteousness” to the guilty, “ sanctification” to the polluted, “ redemption” to the enslavedⁱ. He addresses himself to the very persons who are thus mourning over their blind, naked, destitute condition ; and bids them accept at his hands, “ gold, that they may be enriched ; raiment, that they may be clothed ; and eye-salve, that they may see^k.” To feel and to lament their need of these things, is all the qualification that he requires for the reception of them. To those who are insensible of their need he will impart nothing ; but to the humble and contrite he will give more than they can either ask or think. Indeed the “ kingdom of heaven” is theirs : they have not only *a title* to all its blessings, but *an earnest* of them already in their souls. Their poverty and contrition are *evidences* that the throne of Christ is already established in their hearts : and as certainly as they are made partakers of the kingdom of grace, so shall they in due time inherit the kingdom of glory.

And are not these persons justly called “ happy ! ” Who are “ happy, but they who have their unrighteousness forgiven, and their sin covered^m ? ” Who are happy, but they who have Christ for their friend, and heaven for their everlasting inheritance ? — — —]

2. Their comforts are great also—

[Strange as it may appear, there is a comfort, an exceeding great comfort, in mourning for sin ; insomuch that the true Christian reckons the seasons of his deepest humiliation among the happiest hours of his life. But view the penitent when applying to his soul the great and precious promises of the Gospel : feels he no comfort in this exercise ? — — — View him when he obtains a glimpse of his Lord and Saviour, and a taste of his pardoning love : with what “ unspeakable,
and

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 30. ^k Rev. iii. 17, 18. ^l *μακάριοι*. ^m Ps. xxxii. 1, 2.

and even glorified joy" is he filled! The admiration, the love, the gratitude which he feels on such occasions, sometimes overwhelm him, and he is silent, not for want of will, but for want of power, to declare what God has done for his soul — — — What views has he at times of that inheritance which is reserved for him! With what adoring thoughts does he contemplate it; with what ardent longings does he desire it; with what assured confidence does he expect it! — — — Yes, beloved; his poverty and mourning, so far from robbing him of these joys, are the means of obtaining, enhancing, and perpetuating them — — —

Tell me then, whether these be not comforts far beyond all that the world can give? Yet these are but the beginnings of the Christian's joy: for the cup which he but tastes of upon earth, he shall drink of to the full in heaven, where there are rivers of pleasure at God's right hand for evermore.]

There are two descriptions of persons to whom we wish in few words to address this subject:

1. To those who seek after happiness, but are not religious—

[How long shall it be ere ye shall be convinced of your error? Have ye not had ample proof that Solomon's verdict respecting all worldly enjoyments is true? Have ye not found them to be "vanity and vexation of spirit?" Is there one amongst you that has found the creature to be any thing better than "a broken cistern?" We appeal to the aged, who have had leisure to reflect upon their past experience: we appeal even to the young in the midst of all their gaieties; Have ye found in earthly things any solid and permanent satisfaction? have ye found a portion suited to the desires and capacities of your immortal souls? Go, ask the rich, the great, the gay, Are ye happy? They must all tell you, that "in the fulness of their sufficiency they are in straits." Know ye then, that "God is the only fountain of living water:" in Christ only can ye "find rest for your souls." Continue to seek happiness in the world, and you will only treasure up sorrow and disappointment: begin to seek it in the exercises of religion, and you will soon find that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."]

2. To those who seek after religion, but are not happy—

[Whence is this? Has our blessed Lord deceived us? Has he talked so much about the blessedness of being poor
in

in spirit, and of mourning for sin, and is it all a delusion? No, surely: if you find not happiness in these exercises, it is because you do not engage in them aright. You either will not endure to think so meanly of yourselves as you ought, or you are making your own vileness a reason for distrusting the tender mercy of your God. The reverse of this must be your conduct. You must endeavour to get the most humiliating views of your own guilt and helplessness; and must make that a reason for *going to* the Saviour, not for *staying away from* him. The more you feel your need of a physician, the more earnest you should be in your application to him; and the more will he be glorified in your salvation. Only follow his direction in going to him weary and heavy laden, and you shall soon experience the truth of his promise in finding rest unto your souls.

Peradventure there is some hidden abomination that you do not see, or will not part with. If so, it is no wonder that you are not happy: you may as well expect to be at ease whilst thorns are festering in your flesh, as to be happy while sin is harboured in your souls. But if it be indeed so, that you are upright before God, and are seeking the Saviour with true humility of mind, and yet, through the present clouds that encompass you, you are not happy, God directs you to "stay yourself on him," and gives you this word for your encouragement, that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart:" it is sown, though at present it be under the clods; and in due time it shall assuredly spring up in your souls: your "heaviness may endure for a night; but joy shall come in the morning."]

DCLXI.

CHRISTIAN MEEKNESS.

Matt. v. 5. *Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.*

WHILST it is acknowledged on all hands, that Christianity far surpasses all other religions in the sublimity of its doctrines, few are aware how much it excels them also in the purity of its precepts. But we need go no further than to the words before us, to illustrate the superiority of the Christian code above all others. Whatever might assimilate us to ferocious beasts, has been a subject of praise among

among the heathen world. To contend with enemies, to revenge affronts, to be foremost in deeds of heroism, this has exalted men to deities: but to be of a meek and yielding spirit has been deemed rather an indication of weakness, and a reason for contempt. Yet this is the spirit which our blessed Lord particularly commends, and declares to be intimately connected with true happiness.

In vindication of his assertions, we propose to set before you,

I. The character here specified—

The disposition which distinguishes the persons here spoken of, is not that natural mildness and gentleness with which some are favoured even from the womb: (persons of this description may be as far from true Christian meekness, as others who are of a more violent temper:) but a meekness founded in “poverty of spirit,” and in “mourning for sin,” a fruit of the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul^a. To view the Christian in the exercise of this grace, let us look at him,

1. In his conduct towards God—

[He no longer, like others, disputes against the word of God, or murmurs on account of the dealings of his Providence. Whatever God requires, appears, in his eyes, to be right^b: and whatever He does, though for the present it may be dark and inexplicable, is considered as wise and good. He dares not on any account to “reply against God^c.” Instead of objecting to any declaration, command, or threatening, as “an hard saying,” he “trembles at it^d,” and receives it with meekness as an engrafted word, “able to save his soul^e.” He may have many and great trials; but instead of “fretting against the Lord,” he bows with humble submission, saying, “not my will, but thine be done.” “He is dumb, and openeth not his mouth,” from the consideration that it is done by a loving and gracious Father^f.]

2. In his conduct towards men—

[He is *courteous*.—If in his unconverted state he has been rough, severe, and harsh, he will not appear to the same advantage as one whose temper and habits have been mild:

^a Gal. v. 22, 23.

^b Ps. cxix. 128.

^c Rom. ix. 20.

^d Isai. lxvi. 2.

^e Jam. i. 21.

^f Ps. xxxix. 9.

mild: but the operation of divine grace will be more conspicuous in him, by reason of the greatness of the change that has been produced. He is become a new man: all around him discern and feel the difference: as a husband, he is more tender; as a father, more kind; as a master, more gentle; as a member of society, more engaging. He is modest, affable, easy of access, and amiable in the whole of his deportment. There is nothing of an overbearing disposition in him, but a willingness that others should think and act for themselves as well as he. This is his character, as described by the pen of an inspired writer: he is "no brawler, but gentle, shewing all meekness to all men^z."

He is *patient*.—Many in their natural state are so irritable, that it is impossible to please them long together: they are like the sea, tossed and agitated by every breath of wind: not so the person who has attained the character in the text. We say, not that he *never* speaks unadvisedly with his lips; for even Moses, the meekest of the human race, transgressed in this particular^b; and, if a man so bridled his tongue, as never in any instance to offend in word, he would be altogether perfectⁱ. But the Christian has attained such a measure of self-government, as "not to be easily provoked." He is "slow to wrath, knowing that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God^k." He accounts it "his glory to pass over a transgression^l." Where the offence committed is of such a nature as to require an expression of his displeasure, he endeavours so to guard his anger, so to temper it with love and pity, and so to restrain it both in measure and duration, that he may fulfil the precept, "Be angry, and sin not^m." He is particularly on his guard in relation to religious controversy. If his sentiments are represented as erroneous and absurd, instead of yielding immediately to vehemence and invective, he will "give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fearⁿ;" and will "instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth^o." If, on the other hand, it falls to his lot to reprove a fallen brother, he will endeavour to "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering himself, lest he also be tempted^p."

He is *forgiving*.—He may receive injuries like other men: but he will not resent them as others do. He knows that he is "not to recompense evil for evil unto any man," but rather to "heap coals of fire on the head of his enemies," if
by

^z Tit. iii. 2.

^k Jam. i. 19, 20.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iii. 15.

^b Ps. cvi. 33.

^l Prov. xix. 11.

^o 2 Tim. ii. 25.

ⁱ Jam. iii. 2.

^m Eph. iv. 26, 27.

^p Gal. vi. 1.

by any means he may at last melt them into love: "instead of being overcome of evil, he strives with all his might to overcome evil with good¹." The rule to which he endeavours to conform, is that which is laid down by our blessed Lord; (and who might so well require it of us, seeing that he himself exemplifies it so wonderfully towards all his people?) it is that of forgiving, not once, or seven times merely, but seventy times seven². In this indeed he labours to resemble Christ himself, "forbearing and forgiving others, even as Christ hath forgiven him³." He does not, it is true, receive to his bosom a person who is so constantly offending; nor is it necessary that he should, till the person himself be renewed in the spirit of his mind: but he will so far forgive, as to bear not the smallest ill-will towards him, but to be really glad of any opportunity to do him good.]

Such, though in different degrees, is the true Christian. All do not attain the same eminence in these virtues; but all are distinguished for them in proportion to the grace they have received; nor can any man be accounted a true Christian, unless he have "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price⁴."

If such a man is distinguished in the character he sustains, he is no less so in,

II. The blessedness he enjoys—

The New Testament encourages us principally by a hope of spiritual blessings: yet it sometimes gives us reason to expect also such as are temporal⁵. That the promise here given to the meek is temporal, appears from the passage in the Psalms, from whence it is quoted⁶: and it is indeed fulfilled to every one that answers to the character in the text.

1. He has fewer occasions of disquietude than others—

[Others, in addition to the common calamities of life, create trouble to themselves by their ungoverned tempers. When all would be peaceable and tranquil, they by their "grievous words stir up anger⁷." As, to a man in a fever, every posture is uneasy, every food insipid, every office

¹ Rom. xii. 17—21.

² 1 Pet. iii. 4.

³ Ps. xxxvii. 11.

⁴ Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

⁵ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

⁶ Prov. xv. 1.

⁷ Col. iii. 13.

Matt. vi. 33.

troublesome; so, to an impatient fretful man, every thing becomes a source of trouble and vexation. Both the one and the other are ready to think that people are in league, as it were, against them: but the disease is within themselves; and it is the soreness of their own flesh, not the hardness of the touch, that is in reality the source of their pain. But the man that is truly meek, cuts off, instead of multiplying, occasions of pain. By kindness and courtesy he disarms his adversary; and “by his soft words, he turneth away wrath^a.” If he has himself inadvertently done wrong, he freely acknowledges his fault; and thus “by yielding, pacifieth even great offences^a.” If he have received an injury, the same disposition leads him to accept an acknowledgment, and not to insist on all the reparation which perhaps he might be justified in requiring. In many cases he turns away his eyes from the evil that is done, and lets it pass unnoticed. In this manner he is kept from a thousand disputes which agitate others, and passes through life with half the troubles that vex and harass the world around him.]

2. He is less affected by those which do occur—

[The sturdy oak has often its branches broken off by a storm, or perhaps is torn up by the roots, whilst the supple reed sustains no injury at all. Thus the meek submissive Christian bears up under those trials which the stoutest of ungodly men would be unable to endure. He receives them as from the hand of God, and says, “Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins^b?” “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him^c.” Even when men are the immediate causes of his troubles, he still looks, through the second causes, unto God the first cause of all; and says with Job, “The *Lord* gave, and the *Lord* hath taken away; blessed be the name of the *Lord*^d!” How different is the state of such a man from one, who, “like a wild bull in a net,” foams and bellows with impotent unavailing rage! The world is not like the same place to the two characters: to the one it is as the confines of hell; to the other, the portico of heaven.]

3. He is more tranquil in his own mind—

[This necessarily arises from the two preceding considerations: but it is true in another point of view: the meek person has the testimony of a good conscience, and enjoys the presence of his God; whilst those who are destitute of that holy disposition, are of necessity unacquainted with these sources of heavenly consolation. As it is not possible

^a Prov. xv. 1.

^a Eccl. x. 4.

^b Lam. iii. 39.

^c Mic. vii. 9.

^d Job i. 15, 17, 21.

possible for an impenitent unbelieving soul to taste that peace which passeth all understanding; so neither can one who is morose, or irritable, or vindictive. "His sins will hide good things from him, and will separate between him and his God ^e."

The promise in the text is supposed by many to refer to the *land* of Canaan; and to that as typical of heaven^f. And certainly in this sense also it is fulfilled to those who are truly meek. Often do they, (and never more than when suffering for righteousness sake,) obtain Pisgah views of that Promised Land; and often are refreshed with the grapes of Eschol, even when most destitute of earthly comforts. In a word, they have a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not, and which is an earnest and foretaste of their heavenly inheritance^g.]

ADDRESS—

[Let St. Peter be heard in confirmation of all that has been said ^h: "Good days" are "a blessing" which God designs us "to inherit:" and a meek demeanour is the means by which we are to obtain it. Let us not, however, put any Christian grace in the place of Christ: it is HE, and he alone, that can give us either peace with God, or peace in our own consciences—— Nevertheless meekness, *as a means*, is conducive to happiness: and it is in vain to expect happiness, either in this world or in the next, if we do not attain it. "Who then is a wise man and endued with knowledge amongst you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdomⁱ."]]

^e Isai. lix. 2.

^h 1. Pet. iii. 9—11.

^f τὴν γῆν.

ⁱ Jam. iii. 13.

^g Isai. xxix. 19.

DCLXII.

HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Matt. v. 6. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.*

MEN naturally desire happiness: but they know not in what it is to be found. The philosophers of old wearied themselves in vain to find out what was man's chief good. But our blessed Lord has informed us wherein it consists: it is found in holiness alone; which, when embodied, as it were, and exercised

exercised in all its branches, renders us completely blessed. In this sense we understand the words of our text; wherein are set forth,

I. The distinctive character of a Christian—

It is a gross perversion of Scripture to interpret this passage as relating to the righteousness of Christ: for though it is true that every Christian desires to be clothed in that righteousness, and shall, in consequence of that desire, obtain his wishes, yet it is not the truth contained in the words before us: they certainly relate to that inward righteousness which every Christian must possess, and to that “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

Now the character of every Christian is, that he desires holiness,

1. Supremely—

[Other desires are not eradicated from the human breast: the natural appetites remain after our conversion the same as before, except as they are restrained and governed by a higher principle. In proportion, indeed, as religion gains an ascendant in the soul, those words will be verified, “He that eateth and drinketh of the water that Christ will give him, shall never thirst^a.” But from the very commencement of the Divine life, all earthly things sink in the Christian’s estimation, and are accounted as dung and dross in comparison of the Divine image. In this sense “Christ is all” to him^b; and he can say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee.”]

2. Constantly—

[While other desires remain in the heart, they will of course occasionally rise in opposition to the better principle: but the prevailing desire of the soul is after holiness. “The flesh may lust against the spirit,” and seem for a moment to triumph over it: but “the spirit will lust and strive against the flesh^c,” till it has vanquished its rebellious motions. The needle may be driven by violence from its accustomed position: but its attractions are ever towards the pole; and it will never rest till it has resumed its wonted place.

^a John iv. 14.

^b Col. iii. 11. Christ here means the image of Christ.—See my second Sermon on this text.

^c Gal. v. 17.

place. Its momentary diversion serves but to prove its fixed habitual inclination. In like manner, temptation itself, in rousing up the soul to action, calls forth its heavenly tendencies, and displays the holy energies with which it is endued.] •

3. Insatiably—

[Every other desire may be satiated; but the more of spiritual nourishment we receive, the more will our hunger and thirst after it be increased. St. Paul himself could not sit down contented; but forgetting what he had attained, he reached forth for higher degrees of holiness^d. It is only “when we awake up after the perfect likeness of our God, that we shall be satisfied with it^e.”]

Truly enviable will this state appear, if we consider,
II. The blessedness annexed to it—

To be filled with good and nutritious food is the utmost that the bodily appetite can desire. It is in this sense that we are to understand the promise in the text. The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, shall be made,

1. Truly righteous—

[There is a negative kind of holiness, which is neither pleasing to God nor profitable to man: it consists merely in an abstinence from open sin, and a discharge of external duties. But real holiness pervades the whole man: it comprehends the whole circle of divine graces: it reaches to the thoughts and desires of the heart; and assimilates us to God in all his communicable perfections. Now this is that with which the true Christian shall be filled: in all his dispositions towards God and man, he shall be changed: he shall not only be delivered from all that would injure his character among men, but shall be “transformed into the very image of his God in righteousness and true holiness.”]

2. Progressively righteous—

[That degree of perfection to which Christians may attain, is not gained at once. All the members of the new man, as well as of the material body, do indeed exist at the moment of our birth: but they are then in a state of infantine weakness: and their arrival at a state of maturity is a gradual work. Now this work shall be advanced in the souls of those who earnestly desire it: “they shall hold on their way, growing stronger and stronger^f,” and, like

^d Phil. iii. 13.

^e Ps. xvii. 15.

^f Job xvii. 9.

like the risen sun, "shining^e brighter and brighter unto the perfect day^e." "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth them^h," and "carry on his work until the day of Christ^l."]

3. Perfectly righteous—

[Though absolute perfection is not to be attained in this life, yet every righteous person may expect it, as the completion of his wishes, and the consummation of his bliss. The moment that his soul is released from this frail tabernacle, it shall bid an everlasting farewell to sin and sorrow. The hunger and thirst which characterize him in this world, will then cease for ever: there will remain to him no heights unattained, no wishes unaccomplished: his soul will be "*filled*" with the desired good, yea, filled to the utmost extent of its capacity.]

APPLICATION—

[Are there *those who, instead of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, despise it?* Tell me, will ye despise it in the day of judgment? will ye despise it, when ye shall see the difference that is put between the godly and the ungodly? And what is that which ye prefer to it? Can ye say of your pleasures, your riches, or your honours, what our Lord says of righteousness? shall ye certainly be filled with those things? or if ye were, would they ever render you truly blessed? Go, ask of Solomon, or ask of any who have made the experiment; and see whether, in their sober moments, they will not confess those things to be "*vanity and vexation of spirit*?" O "*spend not your money any more for that which is not bread, nor labour for that which satisfieth not; but eat ye that which is good, and let your soul be satisfied with fatness^k.*"

Are there *those who rest in a form of religion?* Know that it is not the form, but the power, of godliness that God requires. The Pharisees of old abounded in outward duties; but "*except your righteousness exceed theirs, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" That which you must desire, that which you must attain, is an universal change both of heart and life: "*you must become new creatures: old things must pass away, and all things become new.*"

Are there *any discouraged because of the small proficiency they have made in holiness?* Doubtless this is a matter of lamentation to the best of men. If indeed we are excusing ourselves, and pacifying our consciences from the idea that in this frail state we cannot but commit sin, we

are

are deceiving our own souls; for "he that is born of God, sinneth not"; that is, he *allows not* himself in any sin, whether of excess or defect; whether of commission or of omission. But if "our souls are really athirst for God, and we are panting after him, as the hart after the water-brooks," we need not fear. God will ere long fill the hungry with good things; "he will satisfy the longing soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul." The very idea of hunger is a painful sensation of want; and if holiness be the object of that appetite, all *shall be well*, yea, and all is well: "that soul is blessed, and *shall be filled*."]

1 John iii. 9.

DCLXIII.

THE REWARD OF MERCIFULNESS,

Matt. v. 7. *Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.*

THERE can be no doubt but that every Minister should set forth the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel with frequency and firmness. If he lay not the foundation well, he can never hope to have his labours crowned with success. On the other hand, it becomes him very earnestly to inculcate the necessity of a Christian temper: and, if he be not attentive to this, he must expect, that, whilst his people are filled with head-knowledge, they will dishonour their profession both by their spirit and conduct. Our blessed Lord, throughout this whole discourse, shews us the importance of cultivating holy and heavenly dispositions: and, at the same time that he corrects the false notions which were entertained respecting the nature of his kingdom, declares unequivocally, that it is the practical Christian, and he only, that is truly blessed.

In considering the declaration before us, let us inquire,

I. Who are they that answer to the character in the text—

Love has respect to men universally, whatever their condition be; but mercifulness has respect to them as objects of pity and compassion. Now
 "the

“the merciful” man sympathizes with persons in affliction, and desires to relieve them. He looks with an eye of pity,

1. Upon those who are bowed down under their troubles—

“If their trials be of a *temporal* nature,” he longs to render them such service as their necessities require. Are they labouring under *bodily diseases*? he will rejoice to procure for them all necessary aid^a. Are they oppressed with *poverty*, or in *embarrassed circumstances*? he will deny himself in order to impart to them^b. Are they distressed on account of *painful bereavements*? he will labour to assuage the anguish of their minds by tender assiduities and suitable consolations^c.

If their trials be of a *spiritual* nature, he will labour to bring them to that heavenly Physician, who will apply “the balm of Gilead” to their souls. If a *sense of guilt* appal them, he will lead them to “the fountain opened for sin,” and encourage them with assurances that “the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse them from all sin^d.” If they be sorely *tempted* by Satan, he will endeavour to counteract the wiles and devices of their great adversary, and to direct them to that adorable Saviour, whose “grace shall be sufficient for them^e.” If they be dejected on account of *the hidings of God’s face*, he will “strengthen their weak hands, and confirm their feeble knees, and say unto their fearful hearts, Your God *will* come and save you^f.”]

2. Upon those who, though unconscious of their state, are really in a pitiable condition—

[Does he behold a poor drunken man staggering in the streets? he cannot laugh at his frantic gestures, but is ready to weep over him, as he would over a *máníac* or an idiot that was lacerating his own flesh, or beating his head against a wall. The scoffing infidel, the proud Pharisee, the profane sensualist, the self-deceiving professor, and the bitter persecutor, all in their turn call forth his compassionate regards. He mourns over them, well knowing the misery which they are bringing on themselves^g: and, instead of despising them on account of the superiority of his own character, he longs, if possible, to “turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” If he see any hopeful signs in

^a Job xxx. 25. ^b Job xxix. 11, 16. ^c 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14, 18.

^d Zech. xiii. 1. 1 John i. 7.

^e Eph. vi. 10—18. 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. ^f Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^g So did David, Ps. cxix. 136. Jeremiah, Jer. ix. 1. Paul, Phil. iii. 18, 19. Christ himself, Luke xix. 41.

in them, "he travails in birth with them, till Christ be formed in them^h." Even if they be incorrigibly obstinate, he will not presently give up all hope, but will still watch for opportunities of doing them good. Filled with compassion towards them, he will, if possible, "save them with fear, pulling them out of the fireⁱ." If he himself be evil entreated by them, he is affected with pity rather than with anger; and laments, not so much the injury which he suffers from them, as the injury they do unto their own souls^k.]

Such is the merciful man: O that there were in all of us such a heart!

To prove that all such characters are "blessed," we shall proceed to inquire,

II. What is the reward promised to them—

"They shall obtain mercy," says our blessed Lord. But from whom? from *man*? yes, from man. Good men universally will account it the joy of their hearts to administer to them, whenever occasion shall require — — — And even bad men have within themselves such a conviction of the excellence of such characters, that they must do violence to themselves, before they can withhold that assistance which their necessities may require. Thus Job found it^l, and so shall we^m.

But supposing that men are ungrateful and unmerciful, still such characters shall be blessed; for God will be merciful unto them:

1. Here—

[He will rather feed them by the ministry of ravens, than suffer them to want. "The lions may lack and suffer hunger; but *they* shall not want any good thing." "God will supply all their want according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," and "will bless them in all that they put their hand untoⁿ." But it is in their *souls* that they shall experience the richest blessing. Who can express the joy and delight which merciful men often experience in the exercise of their benevolence. It is no little joy that they diffuse; but infinitely more that they receive; they find the truth of that favourite saying of our Lord, "It is more blessed

^h Gal. iv. 19.

ⁱ Jude xxii. 23.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 15. Luke xxiii. 34.

^l Job xlii. 11, 12.

^m Luke vi. 38. Eccl. xi. 1.

ⁿ Phil. iv. 17—19. Deut. xv. 10.

blessed to give than to receive^o." This, indeed, is promised to them^p. — — — and that God, who cannot lie, will not fail to fulfil his word. In the time of their own greatest need, they shall find God's mercy to them most abundant^q.]

We make our appeal to all who have exerted themselves much in doing good, whether they have not found it incomparably "better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting."

2. Hereafter—

[Though no dispositions or actions of ours can *merit* any thing at the hands of God, he will give unto them "a reward of grace^r." He would even account himself "unjust;" if he did not do so^s. He considers himself as our debtor for every thing that we do, provided we do it from a sense of gratitude to him, and of zeal for his glory; and "he will repay us^t." Not even "a cup of cold water, given for his sake," shall pass without a recompence^u. Our exertions in acts of mercy will be the peculiar subjects of his inquiry in the day of judgment, and will be considered as evidences either of our being meet for glory, or ripe for vengeance^v. And if we be found to have fulfilled his will in relation to them, our harvest shall be proportioned to the seed that we have sown^w. Certainly it becomes us to be jealous of ourselves, that we do not found our hopes of salvation upon our deeds of mercy: for Jesus Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope^x: but if we look for happiness to arise from the employment of "the unrighteous mammon," we must look for it, not in the hoarding of riches, nor in making them subservient to carnal gratifications, but in doing good with them^y: and *in that view*, we do lay up a good foundation against the time to come, a foundation that shall stand for ever^b.]

We will subjoin for your use some salutary CAUTIONS.

1. Be careful to distinguish between mercy and piety—

[It is possible for persons to be of a merciful disposition, whilst they are utter strangers to real piety. Natural constitution has made some more tender than others; and education has formed some to better habits. But it often happens, that persons of benevolent minds imagine all religion

^o Acts xx. 35.

^r Rom. iv. 4.

^s Matt. x. 42.

^t 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^p Isai. lviii. 10. 11.

^q Heb. vi. 10.

^u Matt. xxv. 34—46.

^v Luke xvi. 9.

^w Ps. xli. 1—3.

^x Prov. xix. 17.

^y 2 Cor. ix. 6.

^b 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

ligion to consist in acts of kindness to their fellow-creatures. They found this notion even on the word of God itself^c: but they sadly misinterpret that passage, and entirely overlook the duty of “walking humbly with God.” But this is no less necessary than acts of justice and of mercy; yea, without it, all our virtues will be no better than splendid sins^d — — —]

2. Be careful at the same time to combine mercy with piety—

[Piety cannot exist without mercy. “The wisdom that is from above is full of mercy and good fruits^e.” “The tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is fit only to be hewn down and cast into the fire.” It is by “bearing one another’s burthens that we fulfil the law of Christ^f.” We may *talk of* love to God, but we cannot possess it, if we delight not in every act and exercise of love^g. We may give good words to our indigent neighbour; but, if we do not administer relief at the same time, he will be no better for us: and as our pretences to love will be of no benefit to him, so neither will our pretences to faith be of any benefit to us^h. If we have not learned to “weep with them that weepⁱ,” it is to no purpose to call ourselves Christians: we only deceive our own souls^k.

But it may be said, We have not a capacity to instruct our fellow-creatures; nor have we ability to relieve them: must we therefore be excluded from the number of true Christians? No: “If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not^l.” But let us be sure that there is in us that willing mind, and that God sees “the yearning of our bowels” in secret prayer for the relief of those, whom, in other respects, we are unable to assist.]

3. Be on your guard against any declension in the exercise of this duty—

[We are changeable creatures; and they who “have run well” for a season, are sometimes “hindered” in a more advanced stage of their course^m. But let us be on our guard, that we “be not weary in well-doingⁿ.” If we have learned how to walk and to please God, we should then endeavour to abound more and more^o.” There is no limit at which we should stop. God himself is the pattern we should keep in view; and we should seek to “be merciful

^c Mic. vi. 8.

^d Hab. i. 16.

^e Jam. iii. 17.

^f Gal. v. 2.

^g 1 John iii. 17.

^h Jam. ii. 15, 16.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 13.

^k Jam. ii. 13.

^l ? Cdr. viii. 12.

^m Gal. v. 7.

ⁿ Gal. vi. 9.

^o 1 Thess. iv. 1.

ciful as our Father which is in heaven is merciful^p." If we want motives to exertion, let us reflect on the mercy shewn to us by our adorable Lord and Saviour, "who gave his own life a ransom for us:" or let us consider what compassion he yet daily exercises towards us, "being touched with the feeling of our infirmities^q:" and as he has so loved us as to die for us, let us remember, that life itself is not too great a sacrifice for us to make, to promote the welfare of our fellow-creatures^r.]

^p Luke vi. 36.

^q Heb. iv. 15.

^r 1 John iii. 16.

DCLXIV.

PURITY OF HEART.

Matt. v. 8. *Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.*

THERE is nothing in which mankind more generally imagine happiness to consist than in the uncontrolled indulgence of their passions. It is probable that among those who looked for the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, many pleased themselves with the idea, that his victories would open to them a way for multiplying captives to any extent, and consequently for the unlimited gratification of their corrupt appetites. To counteract such absurd notions, and to evince the spiritual nature of his kingdom, our blessed Lord declared, that happiness was to be found, not "in assimilating" ourselves to the brute creation, but in purity of heart and life: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

I. The character here mentioned, is that which *first* claims our attention—

Purity of heart may be considered as opposed to hypocrisy: in that sense it denotes a freedom from base and selfish ends in the whole of our transactions, both with God and man. Strange as it may seem, the duties of religion itself may be performed from very unworthy motives. Pride, ostentation, self-righteousness, self-complacency, may lie at the foundation of those very services whereby

whereby we pretend to honour God; and may render them, not only worthless, but hateful in his sight^a. Our conduct also towards man may be very specious, and yet be full of dissimulation and craft. It is no uncommon thing, as all who are conversant with the world know, to see men, under the guise of friendship, aiming only to advance their own interests. Such duplicity is hateful to a true Christian. He that is “an Israelite indeed, is without guile.” Purity of heart, in this sense, is beautifully exemplified in the apostle Paul, whose ministrations had no other object than to advance the glory of God in the salvation of men^b. O that all of us possessed the same integrity; and could, like him, appeal both to God and man for the purity of our intentions, and the simplicity of our minds!

But purity may also be understood in opposition to uncleanness: and, if we suppose that our Lord designed to condemn the sensuality of those who expected the Messiah as a temporal Prince, we must of course annex that meaning to his words. Perhaps the more enlarged sense of the text, as comprehending both ideas, is the more just: but as the latter idea is of singular importance, we shall consider the character chiefly in reference to *that*.

We observe, then, that the person who is pure in heart,

1. Abstains from all *acts* of uncleanness—

[Others may make light of fornication and adultery: but he knows them to be ruinous and damning sins: and he abstains from them, not merely from the fear of detection and disgrace, but from a dread of displeasing Almighty God, and of plunging his soul into everlasting misery. He is well convinced, that “the body was not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body^c.” He considers “his body as a member of Christ himself:” and, if tempted to “take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot,” he exclaims with horror, “God forbid^d!”]

2. Harbours

^a Zech. vii. 5, 6.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 13.

^b 1 Thess. ii. 3—6. & 2 Cor. ii. 17.

^d *ib.* ver. 15.

2. Harbours no evil desires in his heart—

[Being of like passions with others, he cannot but feel as others on some occasions: but he has learned through grace to counteract the propensities of nature, and to “crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts.” He knows that “fleshly lusts war against the soul^f,” and that, if not vigorously opposed in the first instance, they will soon gain the ascendant, and lead him captive. He sees how others are enslaved, “having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin^g.” He has heard of that confession in the book of Proverbs, “I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and the assembly^h,” and he dreads lest he in like manner should become a prey to his evil passions. If evil thoughts or desires arise, he regards them as fire, which, if not extinguished speedily, will inflame and consume his soul. Hence he prays day and night, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within meⁱ.” He is not contented with being “like a whited sepulchre, beautiful without, but full of all uncleanness within:” he is as attentive to “the inside of the cup and platter” as to its exterior appearance^k.]

3. Avoids the occasions of evil—

[Many who have a regard for their character, will yet make no scruple of reading books, or hearing songs, or attending scenes which tend to vitiate the mind. They will even court occasions of evil, delighting in that company and conversation which they know by experience to produce bad impressions on their hearts.

Not so the person that is pure in heart: he stands at a distance from every polluting object^l: like Joseph, he flies from those who would corrupt him^m: like Job, he “makes a covenant with his eyes,” and with his heart, that he will neither look, nor think, upon an object that will ensnare himⁿ. He knows that “the very thought of foolishness is sin^o,” and is determined through grace, that “vain thoughts shall not lodge with him.” He hates them: he lothes himself for his propensity to indulge them; and he longs to be “holy as God himself is holy^p.”]

II. The blessedness of those who have attained this character, is the next point to be considered.

1. They

* Gal. v. 24.

^h Prov. v. 14.

ⁱ Ps. lxxiii. 1.

^o Prov. xxiv. 9.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 11.

^l Ps. li. 10.

^m Gen. xxxix. 9, 10.

^p 1 Pet. i. 14—16.

^g 2 Pet. ii. 14.

^k Matt. xxiii. 25—28.

ⁿ Job xxxi. 1.

1. They shall enjoy a sight of God in this world—

[It is true that “God dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto,” and that, in strictness of speech, “no man hath seen him, or can see him.” But there were manifestations of him vouchsafed to his people of old, sometimes through the medium of the human or angelic form, and sometimes by a bright effulgence of his glory. There are also other manifestations which God still makes of himself to the souls of men¹; and which he will vouchsafe to the pure in heart. It must not, however, be expected that, in speaking of these things, we can bring them down to the apprehension of the ungodly: *they* have no eyes to see them, no ears to hear them, no understandings to understand them: and it is as vain to speak of colours to the blind, or sounds to the deaf, or tastes to those who had no palate. Nevertheless we must affirm, on the authority of God himself, that “the pure in heart shall see God.” They shall see him *in his ordinances*, whilst others are altogether unconscious of his presence. They shall see him *in their secret chamber*, where he will draw nigh unto them, and “say, Here I am².” They shall see him *in all the works of creation*, and *in all the dispensations of his providence*. They shall see him *in every comfort* and *in every cross*. His wisdom, his goodness, his love, his mercy, his faithfulness, are ever before their eyes. They have such views of him and his perfections as words cannot describe; and such fellowship with him as a carnal man has no idea of³. The impure may mourn, and even “howl upon their beds;” but the pure, like Moses of old, have near access to God, and see “him who is invisible⁴,” and by that sight are strengthened, supported, comforted, and sanctified.]

2. They shall behold the beatific vision in heaven—

[Thither the unclean can never be admitted⁵. As well might “light have communion with darkness, or Christ with Belial,” as they participate the blessedness of heaven. If it be asked, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and stand in his holy place?” the answer is, “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart⁶.” To him a glorious inheritance is promised: for him a place in the heavenly mansions is prepared: a seat upon the very throne of God himself is reserved for him. There shall his organs of vision be strengthened to behold all the glory of the Godhead.

At

¹ John xiv. 21—23.² Job xxxiii. 26. Isai. lviii. 9.³ 1 John i. 3.⁴ Heb. xi. 27.⁵ Eph. v. 5. Heb. xii. 14.⁶ Ps. xxiv. 4.

At present he "sees God only as through a glass, darkly; but then will behold him face to face. Now he knows him only in part; but then he will know him even as he himself is known".^r"]

ADDRESS,

1. The gay and dissipated—

[Perhaps you refrain from gross iniquity; and therefore "imagine yourselves pure, though you are not washed from your inward filthiness". In this notion you are countenanced by the world at large:— — but "let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of inward, as well as outward impurity, the wrath of God cometh upon all the children of disobedience".^a "Your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost; and if any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy".^b Nevertheless, if you deeply repent of your past sins, you shall be forgiven^c; and if you believe in Christ, you shall be both sanctified and saved^d.]

2. The professors of religion—

[How many who have run well for a season have been hindered and turned aside through the prevalence of their own evil passions! We need not go back to David and Solomon: there is not a place where religion has made any progress, but affords some lamentable proof of the influence of unsubdued lusts. A religious person first conceives a thought; and that thought is suffered to dwell upon his mind. The mind inflamed, yields to the impulse of desire so far as to court familiarity with the alluring object. Conscience reproves; but the deceitful heart suggests, that, as no positive act of sin is intended, no evil will arise. Corruption now begins to work more strongly; and every renewed familiarity with temptation increases its power over us; so that we scarcely know how to keep from the place or person whom we ought to shun. Conscience remonstrates, but in vain: till at last the devil takes us in his snare, and we bring disgrace on our holy profession, and cause the name of God to be blasphemed^e. This is the history of many a religious character. Would we avoid this melancholy *end*? let us avoid the *means*. Let us "keep our hearts with all diligence".^f let us live nigh to God, and beg of him to keep us. Let us beware how we "grieve his Spirit," by tampering with sin, or parleying with temptation. Let us "walk in the Spirit; and then we shall not fulfil the lusts of the

^r 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^z Prov. xxx. 12.

^a Eph. v. 6. 2 Pet. ii. 9, 10.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

^c Jam. iv. 8, 9.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

^e See Jam. i. 14, 15.

^f Prov. iv. 23.

the flesh^g." Let us often ask ourselves, What we shall think of such things in a dying hour? Little dost thou think, whoever thou art, that art yielding to the tempter, how thou art filling thy dying pillow with thorns; and wilt most probably bring on thyself a condemnation far heavier than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. O may "God take you out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set your feet upon a rock, and establish your goings^h!" But concerning this evil we may say, as our Lord said concerning a deaf and dumb spirit whom his Disciples could not cast out, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fastingⁱ."]

3. The conscientious Christian—

[Blessed art thou, who art enabled to maintain "a conscience void of offence towards God and-man." Thou art blessed, and shalt be blessed. If *thou* dost not see so much of God as thou wouldst, thou hast far different views of him from what *they* have who give way to sin. And the time is fast approaching, when thou shalt no more complain of darkness and distance from God, but shalt "behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied with it^k."

Yet even to thee must I say, Watch against the assaults of sin and Satan. It is not past experience that will keep thee: for Solomon fell "after God had appeared to him twice^l." Nor is it high attainments that will preserve thee: for the man after God's own heart became a monument of human frailty and depravity. Nor is even marriage itself sufficient to extinguish the unhallowed flame. You may have, if I may so say, whole flocks at your command, and yet it will not keep you from coveting your neighbour's ewe lamb^m. It is grace, and grace alone, that will enable you to hold on unto the end. In Christ you may trust with joyful confidence: "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joyⁿ." Moreover, he has promised that "you shall have no temptation without a way to escape, that you may be enabled to bear it^o." Apply this promise to your souls, and you shall be enabled to "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^p." Depend not for one moment on yourselves, but "be strong in the grace that is in Christ:" and may the very God of Peace sanctify you wholly! and I pray God that your whole body, soul, and spirit, may be sanctified wholly unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!^q]

^g Gal. v. 16. ^h Ps. xl. 2. ⁱ Matt. xvii. 21.

^k Ps. xvii. 15. ^l 1 Kin. xi. 9. ^m 2 Sam. xii. 2, 4, 8, 9.

ⁿ Jude ver. 24. ^o 1 Cor. x. 13. ^p 2 Cor. vii. 1. ^q 1 Thess. v. 23.

DCLXV.

THE PEACE-MAKERS.

Matt. v. 9. Blessed are the Peace-makers: for they shall be called the Children of God.

RELIGION is altogether a practical thing: it has its foundation indeed in principles; but it has a superstructure of dispositions and actions, which are necessary both to its completion and utility. Nothing can be a stronger proof of this than the discourse before us: for, however we may suppose it designed to rectify men's notions respecting the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and to explain the law in opposition to the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, its direct tendency is to raise the standard of morality both in the hearts and lives of men. The beatitudes which we have already considered, refer principally to the exercises of the heart: that which we propose to notice at this time, relates to the conduct: and, as our blessed Lord has counted it worthy of such a conspicuous place in his discourse, we may be well assured that it deserves from us the most attentive consideration.

Let us then, as on former occasions, consider,

I. The character here spoken of—

The term which we translate “peace-makers,” may be understood, like those which have preceded it, as marking only a pacific temper and conduct^a. But in that view it will correspond very nearly with “the meek,” whose character has been already considered. We therefore take the word agreeably to the sense in which it is translated; and observe, that the peace-makers are they who are studious,

1. To preserve peace where it is—

[View them in the whole of their conduct, and they will be found “following after the things which make for peace.”]

View them *in the State*.—They are not like many who take upon them to condemn every thing which their Governors do:

^a Compare 1 John ii. 29. & iii. 4. with the text, in the Greek.

do: no: they see the 'evil' of a murmuring, discontented, turbulent, and seditious spirit: they are "afraid to speak evil of dignities^b:" they bear in mind the command of God, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the Ruler of thy people^c:" and, instead of "exercising themselves in matters that are too high for them^d," and presuming to judge of measures without having one half the grounds of judgment before them, and "meddling with those who are given to change^e," they are characterized as people "quiet in the land^f."

View them *in the Church*.—It is their constant endeavour so to walk as to "give no offence in any thing," to "cast no stumbling-block before any," but to edify all in faith and love. Many there are, so bigoted to their own sect or party, or so fond of some particular doctrines, that they can scarcely meet a brother or a sister without bringing forward their favourite opinions; and not at all concerned what perplexities they cause in the minds of individuals, or what divisions in the Church, provided they can but make proselytes, and increase their own party^g. Such generally obtrude themselves wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached; and are but too successful in "beguiling unstable souls," and in "corrupting them from the simplicity that is in Christ^h." This they do in direct opposition to the command, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but *not to doubtful disputations*ⁱ." The peace-makers, on the contrary, will "bear the infirmities of the weak^k;" will deny themselves many lawful things, rather than wound a tender conscience^l; and will "become all things to all men^m:" in short, they will do any thing, or forbear any thing, that they may "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peaceⁿ."

View them *in the family*.—Here they are conspicuous for their unremitting exercise of forbearance and love. They do not take offence at every trifle: and, instead of thwarting the little humours and peculiarities of those around them, they are happy to gratify them, and to win their affections by courtesy and condescension. They remember that wise proverb, "Where no wood is, the fire goeth out: so where there is no tale-bearer, the strife ceaseth^o:" and, from a regard to this, they will not listen to tales and stories; much less will they contribute to the circulation of them. If constrained to hear one side of a question, they will suspend their judgment till they have heard the other: and

^b 2 Pet. ii. 10.^c Acts xxiii. 5.^d Ps. cxxxi. 1.^e Prov. xxiv. 21.^f Ps. xxxv. 20.^g Tit. i. 10, 11.^h 2 Cor. xi. 3.ⁱ Rom. xiv. 1.^k Rom. xv. 1.^l Rom. xiv. 21. ¹ 1 Cor. viii. 13.^m 1 Cor. ix. 19—22. ⁿ Eph. iv. 3.^o Prov. xxvi. 20.

and will be studious to weaken, rather than confirm, the unfavourable impressions of the accuser's mind. If a person seem determined to strive with them, they will rather yield their right, than maintain a controversy with him^p. Their conduct in their families may be briefly summed up in those words of David, "They keep their tongue from evil, and their lips from speaking guile: they depart from evil, and do good; they seek peace, and pursue it^q."]

2. To restore it where it is not—

[They do not impertinently obtrude themselves on others, or interfere in concerns which belong not to them: they are aware that "he who meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one who taketh a dog by the ears^r." Yet, if they see an opportunity where they may properly interpose, they are willing, even at a considerable risk, to exert themselves to the utmost for the restoration of peace. If chosen, or permitted to arbitrate between parties, they will not undertake the office but in a *spirit of love*, and with an ardent longing to accomplish the desired end. In executing the office of an umpire, they guard against any undue bias; well knowing, that without the strictest *impartiality* they can never hope to bring over the contending parties to an acquiescence in their decisions. Having begun the good work, they will *persevere* in it, notwithstanding all the discouragements which they may meet with from the obstinacy of those whom they attempt to reconcile. The more blameworthy of the two will usually be found the more unreasonable and perverse^s: but they will patiently bear with much opposition, if by any means they may attain the great object of their wishes.]

In the exercise of this benevolent disposition, they are sure to find,

II. The blessedness annexed to it—

When it is said that "they shall be *called* the Children of God, we must understand, that,

1. They shall be so in reality—

[That this is the import of the expression, appears from the parallel passage in St. John's Epistles; where, having represented Believers as *called* the Children of God, he immediately adds, "Now *are* we the sons of God^t:" and to the same effect he speaks in his Gospel; "To as many as believed,

^p 1 Cor. vi. 7. See Gen. xiii. 8, 9.

^q Ps. xxxiv. 13, 14. with 1 Pet. iii. 8—11.

^r Prov. xxvi. 17.

^s Acts vii. 27.

^t 1 John iii. 1, 2.

believed, to them gave he power to *become* the sons of God ^a." Of course we must, throughout all these beatitudes, guard against supposing that the reward annexed to the different dispositions is founded on any *merit* in man. The reward must always be considered as "a reward of grace, and not as a debt ^z." It is not to be conceived that there should be such *merit* in making peace between our fellow-creatures, as that it should *deserve* such a reward at the hands of God. If we only bear this in mind, we need not be afraid of expecting all the honour which God here promises to the peaceful man. It is taken for granted, that, in our offices of love to man, we are actuated by a sense of love to God: and that, whilst we labour to promote peace amongst our brethren, we are careful to have peace maintained between God and our own souls by the blood of Christ. *Then* shall we be "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty ^y:" yea, we shall "have a name given to us better than of sons and of daughters ^z." Together with this relation to God, the peace-makers shall possess all the exalted privileges connected with it: "being sons, they shall be heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ ^a." It does "not indeed fully appear what they shall hereafter be: but this we know, that when they shall see their heavenly Father, they shall be like him; for they shall see him as he is ^b."]

2. They shall be reputed such by their fellow-creatures—

[It is true, that the world at large are not very ready to acknowledge the excellencies of Believers, or to allow their claims of relationship to God. But there is something in a peaceful spirit, which carries its own evidence along with it, and constrains the beholder to do it homage. St. Paul particularly notices this; and declares, that he who acts under its influence for the honour of Christ, is both "accepted of God, and *approved of men* ^c." We know indeed that the enmity of the human heart against God is such, as to instigate men to persecute even unto death the very persons whom in their consciences they cannot but admire. We therefore do not mean to say that the peace-makers shall meet with no hostility from men; (for our blessed Lord and his Apostles were all crucified or slain :) but that the proper tendency of their conduct is; to conciliate the regard of men, and to impress them with the idea, that they are actuated by the grace of God, and honoured with his peculiar favour.

Surely this blessedness is worthy of our pursuit. TO BE
Children

^a John i. 12. ^x Rom. iv. 4. ^y 2 Cor. vi. 18. ^z Isa. lvi. 5.

^a Rom. viii. 17. ^b 1 John iii. 2. ^c Rom. xiv. 18, 19.

Children of the Most High God is the great object to which we should continually aspire: and to *approve ourselves such* to others is also most desirable; because we shall thereby “silence the ignorance of foolish men,” and constrain them to “glorify our Father which is in heaven.”]

Let me, in CONCLUSION, urge you to seek this blessed character—

[Think *how happy* you will be in the possession of it. “The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace^d.” It is not possible to engage much in such labours of love, without having our own souls refreshed and comforted with the heavenly employment. The sacred oil which you pour on the heads of others, will regale you with its odours; and the dews of Divine grace, which, through your instrumentality, descend on others, shall enrich and fertilize your own souls^e.

Consider further, *how serviceable* you will be in your day and generation. As one litigious or contentious person may be the means of producing incalculable evils to the Church and to society; (for a little fire is sufficient to destroy a whole town^f;) so one pious, discreet, and active peace-maker may extinguish flames, which might have spread desolation and misery all around. See an instance of this in Abigail, who, by her seasonable interposition, restrained the wrath of David, and saved the lives of Nabal and all his family^g. Thus may you confer blessings on all around you, and heap blessings also on your own heads^h.

Lastly, consider *what a recompence* awaits you in the eternal world. There shall this promise be fulfilled to you in its utmost extent.

Cultivate then this amiable disposition, that you may be “sons of God, without rebuke, and shine as lights in a benighted worldⁱ.”]

^d Jam. iii. 18.

^e Ps. cxxxiii. 1—3.

^f Jam. iii. 5.

^g 1 Sam. xxv. 18—31.

^h 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 14, 15.

DCLXVI.

PERSECUTION FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE.

Matt. v. 10—12. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your*

your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you.

CHRISTIANITY, to one who is not acquainted with its real nature, must appear full of paradoxes. In the preceding verses, we are informed what *practical* religion is; and, in the parallel passage in St. Luke's Gospel, we have the same truths yet more plainly and explicitly declared*. Had any uninspired person avowed such sentiments, we should have been ready to pronounce him mad: for there is scarcely any thing which we regard with dread, but a blessing is annexed to it; or any thing which we consider as desirable, but a woe is denounced against it: the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the despised, are congratulated; and the rich, the full, the laughing, and the honoured, are represented as in a truly pitiable condition. But perhaps the greatest paradox of all is, that persons possessed of vital Christianity should be objects of persecution; that their piety should be the ground of that persecution; and that they should, on this very account, be esteemed happy. But so it is: and so it will appear; if we consider,

I. The case here supposed—

Our blessed Lord evidently supposes that his people will be persecuted for righteousness' sake. But,

This, it must be confessed, is a very improbable case—

[*The very character of his people seems to preclude the idea.*—Were the disciples of Christ the very reverse of what they are, we might well expect them to be objects of hatred and contempt. But who can hate the humble, the meek, the pure, the peaceful, and those whose chief desire is to serve and honour God?— — What connexion can there be between the verses of our text, and the whole preceding context? One would imagine that the declaration before us was altogether destitute of any foundation in fact.

That their very righteousness should be the ground of their suffering, appears still more strange.—If they were obnoxious to the charge of sedition, or to any thing else that rendered them

* Luke vi. 20--26.

them bad members of society, one would not wonder that they should be evil treated on those accounts, notwithstanding they might in other respects be eminently holy. But that their conformity to Christ should be the true reason of the world's enmity against them, seems incredible.]

But we are taught to expect that it would exist—

[Our blessed Lord warned all his disciples, that they would receive, each in his appointed measure, the very same treatment as he receives^b. And his Apostles guard us against being surprised or offended at it^c.

We must not indeed imagine that our enemies will avow the real ground of their aversion: they will not say, I hate you for your piety: they will give some other name to piety: they will call it fanaticism, or hypocrisy; and under that character will raise up their voice against it. When the Jews threatened to stone our Lord, he said to them, "Many good works have I done among you; for which of them do you stone me?" They replied, "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God^d." In like manner they sought to put him to death for violating, as they alleged, the sanctity of the sabbath-day^e. But whence came all this zeal for God's honour, and for the observance of the sabbath? Were they all so holy and so righteous? No: in the midst of all their pretended concern for God's law, they were ready enough to violate it themselves, and even to commit murder: which was a demonstration that the reasons they assigned were mere prettexts; and that the sanctity of his character was the true ground of their opposition to him. Precisely thus must we expect persecution, ostensibly as evil-doers, but really as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.]

And experience proves that it does exist—

[Look at the holy men of old: where will ye find one who was not persecuted for righteousness sake? And are the descendants of Cain or of Ishmael extinct? Is not that which St. Paul spoke in reference to Ishmael, still found true? "As *then* he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now^f." Christians are not indeed dragged, as formerly, to prison and to death: but shall we therefore say, that they are not persecuted? Are they not "reviled?" Have they not "all manner of evil spoken against them falsely?" Do not men "separate them from their company," and reproach

^b John xv. 18—21. & xvi. 1. 3. ^c 1 Pet. iv. 12. 1 John iii. 13.

^d John x. 32, 33.

^e John vii. 19, 23.

^f Gal. iv. 29.

reproach them, and cast out their name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake?" Yes truly: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer, yea and *do* suffer, persecution^h." There is not a single exception to be found. Times and circumstances may produce considerable difference in the nature or degree of opposition which may be made to the Lord's people: but all will have to experience *some*. Christianity is the same in itself that it ever was: and it will be found the same in its effects. Christ "came not to bring peace, but a swordⁱ:" and whoever gives himself up to Christ, must expect to find, that "his greatest foes will be those of his own household."]

Granting, then, that this case does exist, let us consider,

II. The light in which it should be viewed—

To the eye of sense it has a very terrific aspect: but to the eye of faith it is by no means formidable: on the contrary, the Believer views his persecutions,

1. As a badge of honour—

[He looks back on all the Prophets; he looks at Christ and his Apostles; and sees that they all trod the same thorny path before him, and "were made perfect through sufferings." Hence he views persecution as "the reproach of Christ^k;" and, in submitting to it, considers himself as "a partaker of Christ's sufferings^l." Whilst others consider him as degraded by the contempt cast upon him, he regards himself rather as exalted by it: he views it as "turning unto him for a testimony^m," that he is indeed a faithful servant of his Lord. St. Paul, speaking of sufferings for Christ's sake, represents them as a special gift of God, an honour bestowed upon us for Christ's sakeⁿ: and in this light all the Apostles regarded them: for when they had been imprisoned and scourged for their fidelity to their divine Master, they went out of the presence of the Council "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's sake^o." Thus, Christian, shouldst thou do: thou shouldst "glory in the cross of Christ^p;" thou shouldst "take pleasure in persecutions for Christ's sake^q;" and instead of being ashamed of the indignities which thou sufferest, thou shouldst glorify God on account of them^r.]

2. As

^h Luke vi. 22. ⁱ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^j Matt. x. 34—36. ^k Luke xii. 51—53.

^l Heb. xi. 25, 26.

^m 1 Pet. iv. 13.

ⁿ Luke xxi. 12, 13.

^o Phil. i. 29.

^p Acts v. 41.

^q Gal. vi. 14.

^r 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^s 1 Pet. iv. 16.

2. As a means of good—

[Even at present the Believer feels that his trials are subservient to his best interests^s; that his tribulations tend to increase his “patience, experience, and hope^t,” and bring him an hundredfold of blessings into his soul^u. And when he looks forward to the eternal world, and considers how rich “a recompence” he shall there receive for every sacrifice which he has here made for God^x, he “accounts himself happy” in being called to bear the cross^y. He knows that “the trial of his faith will be found to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ^z,” and that “his afflictions, which are but light and momentary, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^v.” He expects assuredly “the kingdom of heaven,” because God has promised it to him^b: yea, he expects more: he expects that “his reward shall be great in heaven,” and increased in proportion to his sufferings: he expects it also as a *just* retribution^c: but still he does not expect it as *merited* by those sufferings: he makes the atoning blood of Christ the only foundation of his hope: and it is for Christ’s merits, and not his own, that he is thus exalted. This distinction is accurately marked by the Apostle John; who, seeing in a vision all the martyred saints who “had come out of much tribulation,” tells us, that “they had washed their robes, not in their own tears or blood, but in the blood of the Lamb; and that *therefore* they were before the throne of God^d.” Bear this in mind, my Brethren, and do not hesitate to expect all that God has promised.]

3. As a ground of joy—

[Our blessed Lord, in reference to those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, says, “Blessed are ye;” and he calls upon them to “rejoice, and be exceeding glad.” To the same effect also his Apostles speak; congratulating every persecuted saint, and encouraging him to “glory in all his tribulations^e.” Doubtless, “afflictions are not joyous in themselves, but grievous:” but, when regarded in the preceding views, they become real sources and grounds of joy. St. Paul was certainly a very competent judge: and he, after a careful computation founded on actual experience, says, “I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us^f,” however painful therefore they may be,

^s Heb. xii. 11.

^t Rom. v. 3—5.

^u Mark x. 29, 30.

^x Heb. xii. 26.

^y Jam. v. 11.

^z 1 Pet. i. 7.

^a 2 Cor. iv. 8—11, 16, 17.

^b 2 Tim. ii. 12.

^c 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

^d Rev. vii. 14, 15.

^e Jam. i. 2, 12. 1 Pet. iii. 14. & iv. 12—16.

^f Rom. viii. 18.

667.] EVANGELIC & PHARISAIC RIGHTEOUSNESS. 59

be, if only they conduce to our everlasting felicity, they must, and will, to every believing soul, be an occasion of joy. He will "take joyfully the spoiling of his goods" and, if his blood be poured out as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice and service of the Church's faith, he will congratulate himself on it as a happy event, for which he has reason to bless and glorify his God ^h.]

Let me however subjoin *a word of caution*—

[Take care that your cross is indeed the cross of Christ. If it be brought upon you by your own fault or imprudence, it is your own cross, and not the cross of Christ. See that you do not, from a pretended zeal for God, neglect or violate your duties to man. If you suffer, take care that it is for well-doing, and not for evil doing ^l.]

Let me add also *a word of encouragement*—

[God does not "send you on a warfare at your own charges." He bids you to "commit your soul to him in well-doing," with an assured hope that he will keep it ^k. Your merciful Saviour, who has trod the way before you, will sympathize with you under your trials^l, and overrule them all for good ^m, and in due time put you safely, and for ever, beyond the reach of all ⁿ.]

^g Heb. x. 34.

^h Phil. ii. 17.

ⁱ 1 Pet. iii. 17.

^k 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^l Heb. iv. 15.

^m Rom. viii. 28.

ⁿ Rev. vii. 16, 17.

DCLXVII.

EVANGELIC AND PHARISAIC RIGHTEOUSNESS COMPARED.

Matt. v. 20. *For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

IT would be a gratification to many to know the lowest degree of piety that would suffice for their admission into the kingdom of heaven. But to have such a line drawn for us, would be by no means profitable: for it may well be doubted, whether any, who under present circumstances are slothful in their pursuit of holiness, would be quickened by it; and there is reason to fear that the zeal of many would be damped. Information,
however,

however, of a nature not very dissimilar, is given us; and it will be found of the highest importance to every Child of man. Our blessed Lord has marked out for us a line, that must be passed by all who would be numbered amongst his true disciples. There were certain characters, very numerous among the Jews, characters much contemplated and much admired; these, he tells us, must be surpassed. To equal the most exalted among them will not suffice: our righteousness must exceed theirs, if ever we would enter into the kingdom of heaven. The persons we refer to were the Scribes and Pharisees; the former of whom were the learned teachers and expositors of the law; the latter were a sect who affected peculiar sanctity, and were regarded by the people as the most distinguished patterns of piety and virtue. The two were generally associated together in the Scriptures; because the Scribes, though not necessarily, yet, for the most part, belonged to the sect of the Pharisees: and, so united, they were considered as having all the learning and piety of the nation concentrated in them. But, notwithstanding the high estimation in which they were held, our Lord most solemnly affirmed that none of them could, in their present state, be admitted into heaven; and that all who would be counted worthy of that honour, must attain a higher righteousness than theirs.

This information, I say, is valuable; because, though it is not so definite as to encourage any to sit down contented with their attainments, it serves as a standard by which we may *try* our attainments, and a criterion whereby we may judge of our real state.

In investigating the subject, there are two things to be considered;

- I. *Wherein* our righteousness must exceed theirs; and,
- II. *Why* it must exceed theirs.

To prepare the way for shewing *wherein* our righteousness is to exceed theirs, we must begin with stating, as clearly as we can, what righteousness they possessed. But in doing this, we shall be careful neither to exalt their character too much on the one hand, nor to depress it too much on the other. Indeed, precision in this part of our statement is of peculiar importance; for, as a comparison is instituted between their righteousness and ours, we are concerned to have the clearest knowledge of that by which our estimate must be formed. Their character was a mixture of good and evil. They had much which might be considered as righteousness; and at the same time had great defects. Their righteousness, such as it was, was seen; their defects were unseen: their righteousness consisted in acts; their defects, in motives and principles: their righteousness was that which rendered them objects of admiration to men; their defects made them objects of abhorrence to God.

Let us begin with viewing the favourable side of their character. And here we cannot do better than refer to the account which the Pharisee gives of himself, when addressing the Most High God; and which our Lord particularly adverts to, as characterizing the more distinguished members of their community. After thanking God that he was "not as other men are," he first tells us what he had *not done*: He was "not an extortioner," nor could be accused by any man of demanding, on any account whatever, more than was his due. He was "not unjust" in any of his dealings, but, whether in commercial transactions, or in any other way, he had done to all as he would be done unto^a. "Nor was he an adulterer:" common as the crime of adultery was among the Jews, and great as his advantages had been for insinuating himself into the affections of others, he had never availed himself of any opportunity to seduce his neighbour's wife.

^a Such as "oppressing the hireling in his wages," &c. The expression must of course be confined to *acts of justice*.

wife. In short, he had avoided all those evils, which the generality of publicans and sinners committed without remorse.

He next proceeds to specify what he *had done*. He had “fasted twice every week,” in order to fulfil the duties of mortification and self-denial. He had been so scrupulously exact in paying his tithes, that not even “mint, or rue,” or the smallest herb in his garden, had been withheld from God: “he paid tithes of all that he possessed^b.”

From other parts of Scripture we learn, that the Pharisees were peculiarly jealous of the sacred rest of the Sabbath; insomuch that they were filled with indignation against any one, who, even by an act of the greatest necessity or mercy, should presume to violate it^c. They prayed to God also, and *that* not in a mere cursory manner, hurrying over a form which they got through as quick as possible: no; “they made long prayers,” as well in the corners of their streets, as in the midst of their synagogues^d. As for the purifications appointed by the law, they were punctual in the observance of them: they even multiplied their lustrations far beyond what the law required; and were so partial to them, that they never came home from the market, or sat down to their meals, without washing their hands: they even wondered that any one who pretended to religion, could be so profane, as to eat without having first performed these important rites^e. Nor must we forget to mention, that they abounded in almsgivings; regarding themselves not so much the owners, as the stewards, of the property they possessed^f. In a word, religion, in all its visible branches, was, in their eyes, honourable; and, in token of their high regard for it, they made their phylacteries broader than any other sect, and “enlarged the fringes of their garments;” thus displaying before all men their zealous attachment to

^b Luke xviii. 11, 12.

^c Mark iii. 2, 5, 6.

^d Matt. vi. 5. & xxiii. 14.

^e Mark vii. 2—5.

^f Matt. vi. 2.

to the laws of God^s. Nor were they content with thus fulfilling their own duties: they were desirous that all should honour God in like manner: persuaded that they themselves were right, they strove to the uttermost to recommend their tenets and practices to others, and would even “compass sea and land to make one proselyte^h.”

Of course, the attainments of all were not exactly alike: some would excel more in one branch of duty, and others in another branch. St. Paul himself was of that sect, as his parents also had been before him; and he was as fair a specimen of them, as any that can be found in all the records of antiquity. He was, “as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church, (whom he considered as enemies to God;) and, as touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

Having thus ascertained what their righteousness was, we can now proceed to point out wherein ours must exceed it.

But here it will be proper to observe, that as all were not equally eminent in what may be called their righteousness, so, on the other hand, all were not equally faulty in the vicious part of their character. We must take the Pharisees as a body, (for it is in that view that our Saviour speaks of them in the text;) and must not be understood to impute to every individual the same precise degree either of praise or blame. Nor must we be considered as saying, that no one of that sect was ever saved: because, previous to the coming of our Lord, there doubtless were many who served God according to the light that they enjoyed: but this we must be understood distinctly to affirm, that no person who enjoys the clearer light of the Gospel, can be saved, unless he attain a better righteousness than the Scribes and Pharisees, as a body, ever did attain, or than any one of

^s Matt. xxiii. 5.

^h ib. ver. 15.

of them, while he rejected the Gospel, could possibly attain.

I am well aware, that, when we consider their fastings; their prayers, their alms-deeds, their strict observances of all the ritual laws, together with their zeal in promoting the religion they professed; and take into the account also, that they were free from many of the more gross and common sins; we shall seem to have left no room for superiority in our obedience. But, whatever may be thought of their attainments, our righteousness must exceed theirs: it must exceed theirs, First, in *the nature and extent* of it; and next, in *the principle and end* of it.

First, In the nature and extent of it—

From what has been already spoken, it sufficiently appears, that the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was for the most part external and ceremonial; or, where it seemed to partake of that which was internal and moral, it was merely of a negative kind, and extremely partial in its operation. Now the Christian's righteousness must be totally different from this: it must be internal and spiritual: it must descend into the heart, and have respect to the whole of God's revealed will. The true Christian will affix no limits to his exertions; he will set no bounds to his heavenly desires. He does not limit the commandments to their literal sense, but enters into their spiritual import, and considers a disposition to commit sin as nearly equivalent to the actual commission of it. He considers himself as accountable to God for every inclination, affection, appetite; and endeavours not only to have their general tendencies regulated according to his law, but to have "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." In a word, he aspires after perfection of every kind: he desires to love God, as much as to be saved by him; and to mortify sin, as much as to escape punishment. Could he have his heart's desire, he would be "holy, as God himself

himself is holy," and "perfect, as God himself is perfect."

Thus, in the *nature and extent* of the two kinds of righteousness, there is an immense difference; nor is there a less difference in their *principle and end*.

Would we know what was the *principle* from which the Pharisaic righteousness proceeded? We can assert, on the most unquestionable authority, even that of Christ himself, that "all their works¹ they did to be seen of men¹." And St. Paul no less strongly marks the *end*, to which all their zeal was directed. He confesses that "they had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge: for, being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God^k." In these respects then we must differ from them. We should *shun ostentation* and vain-glory, as much as we would the most enormous crimes. We should bear in mind, that any thing done with a view to man's applause, is altogether worthless in the sight of God: whatever it be, we have in the applause of men the reward we seek after, and the only reward that we shall ever obtain.* We should also *dread self-righteousness*, as utterly inconsistent with a Christian state. St. Paul assures us, that "the Jews, who sought after the law of righteousness, did not attain to [any justifying] righteousness, because they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone¹." The making of our own works the foundation of our hope towards God, argues a contempt of that "foundation which God has laid in Zion:" it thrusts out from his office the Lord Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness," and who, from that very circum-
stance,

¹ Matt. xxiii. 5.

^k Rom. x. 2, 3.

¹ Rom. ix. 31, 32.

stance, is called, "The Lord our Righteousness." A truly Christian spirit will lead us, even "after we have done all that is commanded us, to say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that [only] which it was our duty to do." See this exemplified in the apostle Paul, than whom there never was but one brighter example of piety in the world: he, after all his eminent attainments, "desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ^m."

Now then, compare the righteousness of the two parties; the one, "cleansing carefully indeed, and superstitiously, the outside of the cup and platter, whilst within they were full of many unsubdued lusts;" the other, allowing not so much as an evil thought, but "cleansing themselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God:" the one filled with a high conceit of their own goodness, and claiming heaven itself on account of it, whilst they aimed at nothing but the applause of man; the other, in the midst of their most strenuous exertions to serve and honour God, renouncing all dependence on themselves, and "glorying only in the cross of Christ:" the one, a compound of pride, unbelief, and hypocrisy; the other, of humility, and faith, and heavenly-mindedness. Whatever may be thought by those who know not how to appreciate the motives and principles of men, we do not hesitate to apply to these parties the distinctive characters assigned them by Solomon, and to say, that "Wisdom excelleth folly, as much as light excelleth darknessⁿ."

If now we proceed to the second point of our inquiry, and ask, *Why* our righteousness must exceed theirs? the text furnishes us with a sufficient answer: If we be no better than they, the Lord Jesus assures us, "that we shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Under the expression,

pression, "The kingdom of heaven," both the kingdom of grace on earth, and the kingdom of glory in heaven, must be comprehended; for they are, in fact, the same kingdom; and the subjects in both are the same: only in the one, they are in an infantine and imperfect state, whereas, in the other, they have attained maturity and perfection: but from both shall we be alike excluded, if we possess not a better righteousness than theirs: the Lord Jesus will no more acknowledge us as his disciples here, than he will admit us into his beatific presence hereafter.

We cannot then without this be partakers of the *kingdom of grace*. The Lord Jesus Christ has told us plainly, that he does not regard those who merely "say unto him, Lord, Lord," however clamorous they may be, or ostentatious, of their zeal for him: he approves of those only "who do the will of his Father which is in heaven." We may assume the name of his disciples, and be numbered amongst them by others; we may associate ourselves with them, as Judas did, and be as little suspected of hypocrisy as he; we may even deceive ourselves as well as others, and be as confident that we are Abraham's children as ever the Pharisees of old were; we may, like them, be quite indignant to have our wisdom and goodness called in question; "Are we blind also?" "in so saying, thou condemnest us:" But all this will not make us Christians. A sepulchre may be whitened and rendered beautiful in its outward appearance; but it will be a sepulchre still; and its interior contents will be as loathsome as those of a common grave. It is to little purpose to "have the form of godliness, if we have not the power;" to "have a name to live, whilst yet we are really dead." God will not judge of us by our profession, but our practice: "Then are ye my friends," says our Lord, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." To this effect is that declaration also of the Psalmist: having asked, "Who shall
ascend

ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?" he answers, "He that hath clean hands, and a *pure heart*." The truth is, that those whom Christ will acknowledge as his disciples, have been "born again;" they are "renewed in the spirit of their minds;" "they are new creatures; old things are passed away, and all things are become new: they have been taught the spirituality and extent of God's law; to know, that an angry word is murder, and an impure desire adultery; and in that glass they have seen themselves guilty, polluted, and condemned sinners: they have been stirred up by this view of themselves to flee unto Christ for refuge, as to the hope set before them in the Gospel: having "found peace with God through the blood of his cross," they devote themselves unfeignedly to his service, and strive to "glorify him with their bodies and their spirits, which are his." *Here is the true secret of their obedience;* "The love of Christ constraineth them; because they thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again." This is conversion; this is regeneration; this is what every Scribe and Pharisee must be brought to: even Nicodemus, "a master in Israel," must become a disciple of Christ in this way: for our Lord declared to him in the most solemn manner, that, "unless he should be [thus] born again, he could not enter into the kingdom of God."

The same is true in relation to the *kingdom of glory*. Whilst we are in this world, the tares and the wheat, which grow together, may so resemble each other, that they cannot be separated by human sagacity. The Jewish tares (as I myself know by ocular inspection) cannot, even when full grown, be immediately distinguished from wheat by a common observer: the difference, however, is soon found

• The learned are not agreed what the ζιζάνια were. Parkhurst's

found by rubbing the ears, which in the one are nearly empty, and in the other are full of grain. The same may be noticed also in the religious world. Not only common observers, but even those who have the deepest insight into characters, and the best discernment of spirits, may be deceived; but God can never be deceived: however specious we may be in our outward appearance, he will discern our character through the thickest veil; "he searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins;" or, as it is yet more strongly expressed, "he weigheth the spirits:" he knows exactly the qualities of which every action is compounded, and can separate, with infallible certainty, its constituent parts: and, when we shall stand before him in judgment, he will distinguish the upright Christian from the hypocritical and specious Pharisee, as easily

account of them, in his Lexicon, is, that they were "a kind of plant, in appearance not unlike corn or wheat, having at first the same kind of stalk, and the same viridity; but bringing forth no fruit, at least none good." Macknight is precisely of the same opinion. Linnæus, speaking of that very species which the author here refers to, designates *them* as the *zizania*. Later botanists deny that that plant grew in Judea; and represent it as of American growth. Whether Linnæus was right, is no part of the author's intention to discuss. He merely mentions the fact, that he has seen (in a green-house at Bristol), and had in his own possession an ear of it for some months, till incredulous persons rubbed it to pieces, that plant, which Linnæus identifies with the *zizania* of Judea; which in our Translation of the Bible, is called *tares*; and which, though to all appearance useless and unproductive, may easily be mistaken for wheat in full ear. In this view, whatever it be called, it illustrates his subject: and, if it be the *zizanon*, it reflects a beautiful light also upon the parable of the tares, Matt. xiii. Some indeed think, that because the servants distinguished the *zizania* from the wheat, there was no resemblance between them. But that argument is by no means conclusive: for the servants, who were constantly habituated to the sight of tares and wheat, might easily discern that they were mixed in the field, whilst yet the difference might not be so great, but that a number of persons employed to pull them all up, might make innumerable mistakes, and root up much of the corn with them. The parable indeed *may* be explained without supposing any resemblance between the two; but such an interpretation destroys, in the author's apprehension, much of the force, and beauty, and importance of the parable.

easily "as a man divideth his sheep from the goats." Then shall the final separation take place; "the wheat shall be treasured up in the garner, and the tares shall be burnt with unquenchable fire." Here then is a further reason for the assertion in our text. If an outside religion would suffice, we might rest satisfied with it: but if we have a Judge, "whose eyes are as a flame of fire," to whom the most secret recesses of the heart are "naked and open," just as the inwards of the sacrifices were to the priest appointed to examine them; and if, as he has told us, "he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart;" then must we be, not specious Pharisees, but real Christians, even "Israelites indeed, and without guile:" we must not be contented with being Jews outwardly, but must be Jews inwardly, and have, not the mere circumcision of the flesh, but the inward circumcision of the heart, whose praise is not of men, but of God^p."

The peculiar importance of the subject, we hope, will plead our excuse, if we trespass somewhat longer than usual on your time. In our statement we have been as concise as would consist with a clear exposition of the truth. In our application of it we shall also study brevity, as far as the nature of the subject will admit. An audience habituated to reflection, like this, will never grudge a few additional moments for an investigation so solemn, so weighty, so interesting as the present.

1. The first description of persons, then, to whom our subject is peculiarly applicable, and for whose benefit we are desirous to improve it, is that class of hearers who *come short* of the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Many there are, it is to be feared, who, so far from "not being as other men are," cannot at all be distinguished from the generality of those around them: who, instead of "fasting twice a week,"
have

have never fasted twice, nor even once, in their whole lives, for the purpose of devoting themselves more solemnly to God: who, instead of "making long prayers," never pray at all, or only in so slight, cursory, and formal a manner, as to shew that they have no pleasure in that holy exercise. Instead of keeping holy the sabbath-day, they "speak their own words, do their own work, and find their own pleasure," almost as much as on other days; or if, for decency's sake, they impose a little restraint upon themselves, they find it the most wearisome day of all the seven. Instead of paying tithes with scrupulous exactness, they will withhold the payment both of tithes and taxes, if they can do it without danger of detection; thus shewing, that they have not even a principle of honesty to "render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Perhaps they may now and then give away somewhat in charity; but they do not consecrate a portion of their income to God as a religious act, nor even account it their duty so to do, notwithstanding "every man" is expressly commanded to "lay by him in store for charitable uses, according as God has prospered him." Instead of being able to appeal to God that they have never been guilty of whoredom or adultery, they stand condemned for one, or both, of these things in their own consciences; or, if they do not, their chastity has proceeded from other causes, than either the fear of God, or the hatred of sin. Instead of honouring religion in the world, they have been ashamed of it, yea perhaps despised it, and held up to scorn and ridicule those who were its most distinguished advocates: thus, so far from labouring to proselyte people to righteousness, they have used all their influence to deter men from it.

What shall we say then to these characters? Shall we encourage them with the hopes of heaven? Must we not rather adopt the Apostle's reasoning, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the

the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Yes; if the Pharisees, with all their righteousness, could not enter into heaven, how shall *they* come thither, who are destitute of their attainments? If every one must perish who does not exceed their righteousness, what must become of those who fall so short of it? O that this argument might have its proper weight amongst us! O that men would not trifle with their souls, on the very brink and precipice of eternity! "Consider, Brethren, what I say; and the Lord give you understanding in all things!"

2. Next we would solicit the attention of those who *are resting in* a Pharisaic righteousness. This is the kind of religion which is held in esteem by mankind at large. An outward reverence for the ordinances of religion, together with habits of temperance, justice, chastity, and benevolence, constitute what the world considers a perfect character. The description which St. Paul gives of himself previous to his conversion, is so congenial with their sentiments of perfection, that they would not hesitate to rest the salvation of their souls on his attainments. But what said he of his state, when once he came to view it aright? "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He saw, that brokenness of heart for sin, a humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ, and an unreserved devotedness of heart to his service, were indispensable to the salvation of the soul. He saw, that, without these, no attainments would be of any avail; yea, that a man might have all the Biblical learning of the Scribes, and all the sanctified habits of the Pharisees, and yet never be approved of the Lord in this world, nor ever be accepted of him in the world to come. Is it not then desirable, that those who are in repute for wisdom and piety amongst us, should pause, and inquire, Whether *their* righteousness really exceeds

ceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees? Would they not do well to study the account which St. Paul gives of himself previous to his conversion, and to examine wherein they surpass him? Alas! alas! we are exceedingly averse to be undeceived; but I would entreat every one of my hearers to consider deeply what our blessed Lord has spoken of such characters: “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God⁹.”

3. Lastly, we would suggest some profitable considerations to those who *profess to have attained* that superior righteousness spoken of in our text.

You need not be told, that the examples of Christ and his Apostles, and indeed of all the primitive Christians, were offensive, rather than pleasing, to the Pharisees of old. The same disapprobation of real piety still lurks in the hearts of those who “occupy the seat of Moses¹⁰,” and you must not wonder if your contrition be called gloom; your faith in Christ, presumption; your delight in his ways, enthusiasm; and your devotion to his service, preciseness or hypocrisy. Well, if it must be so, console yourselves with this, that you share the fate of all the saints that have gone before you; and that your state, with all the obloquy that attends it, is infinitely better than that of your revilers and persecutors: you may well be content to be despised by men, whilst you are conscious of the favour and approbation of God.

But take care that “you give no just occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully.” The world, and especially those who resemble the Scribes and Pharisees, will watch your conduct narrowly, just as their forefathers did that of our Lord himself; and

⁹ Luke xvi. 15.

¹⁰ By this expression is meant, Those who professing, like the Pharisees, to reverence the Scriptures as the word of God, expound them as they did, and make use of them to discourage, rather than promote, real piety. But it is not to be limited to any order of men whatever.

and happy will they be to find occasion against you. As for your secret walk with God, they know nothing about it: your hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, are nothing to them: these are the things which they deride as airy visions and enthusiastic cant. They will inquire into those things which come more under their own observation, and on which they set an exclusive value: they will inquire how you demean yourselves in your several relations of life; whether you are temperate in your habits, modest in your demeanour, punctual in your dealings, true to your word, regular in your duties, and diligent in your studies. They will point to many of their own followers as highly exemplary in all these particulars; and if they find you inferior to them in any respect, they will cast all the blame upon religion, and take occasion from your misconduct to confirm themselves in their prejudices. Permit me, then, to say to all my younger Brethren, and especially to all who shew any respect for religion, that religion, if true and Scriptural, is uniformly and universally operative; and that it is a shame to a religious person to be surpassed by a Pharisee in any duty whatsoever. Though I would be far from encouraging any of you to boast, I would entreat all of you so to act, that you may, if compelled by calumnies, adopt the language of the Apostle; "Are they Hebrews? so am I: Are they Israelites? so am I: Are they of the seed of Abraham? so am I: Are they Ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool; I am more; in labours more abundant." Thus be ye also prepared to repel comparisons, or to turn them to your own advantage: and shew, that, in all the social and relative duties, and especially in those pertaining to you as Students*, you are "not a whit behind the chiefest among them;" but that even in the things wherein they most value themselves, "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour^s."

* Preached the before University of Cambridge.

^s Prov. xii. 26.

DCLXVIII.

CHRIST'S EXPOSITION OF THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

Matt. v. 21, 22. *Ye have heard that it was said by^a them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

GENERAL statements, and general invectives, rarely carry any conviction to the mind: they must be supported by an induction of particulars, before they can produce any material effect. Assertions without proofs will be taken for calumny; but, when supported by fact, they will bear down all opposition. The assertions of our blessed Lord, indeed, needed no confirmation; because "He knew what was in man;" and because his miracles were a sufficient attestation to his word. Yet even He condescended to substantiate his accusations by appeals to fact.

He had intimated, that the Scribes and Pharisees both did and taught many things contrary to his revealed will: and he had declared, that unless we have a better righteousness than theirs, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. To evince the truth of his charge, and of the declaration founded upon it, he shews, that they had grossly perverted the sixth commandment: which on that account he proceeds to explain.

Let us consider,

I. His exposition of this commandment—

The commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," was one of those proclaimed from Mount Sinai, and written by the finger of God himself on tables of stone^{aa}. An order was afterwards given, that the crime of murder should be invariably punished with the death of the offender^b. These two were by the

^a It should rather be "to." See Whitby on the place.

^{aa} Exod. xx. 13.

^b Numb. xxxv. 30, 31.

the Pharisees joined together, as though they had been one and the same commandment: "Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment." The effect of this union was, that, first, the *import* of the commandment was thereby limited to actual murder; and, next, the *sanction*, with which it was enforced, was limited to a punishment inflicted by the Civil magistrate. Hence all other violations of the commandment were either overlooked, as no offences at all, or were considered as of very light moment: and though God's future judgment might not be expressly denied, it was at least kept very much out of sight, by this method of interpreting the word of God.

To rectify these errors, our Lord gave ~~his~~^{his} exposition of the commandment. He explained,

1. Its import—

[It had been thought to extend only to actual murder; but he declared, that it prohibited *all causeless anger in the heart*, and *all outward expression of it with the lips*. .

In determining the sinfulness of anger, two things are to be considered, namely, the *object*, and the *occasion* of our anger. The only legitimate *object* of it is sin. The sinner himself should be regarded with love and pity; and his sin only should move our anger. Thus it was with our blessed Lord when he exercised anger; "He looked round about on the Pharisees with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts^c." The *occasion* too must be just: our anger must not be causeless, or disproportionate to the offence, or of too long continuance. Where our anger is faulty in none of these respects, we observe the true medium; "We are angry, and sin not^d:" but where any one of these barriers is broken down, there the anger becomes a violation of the sixth commandment.

Similar distinctions must be made respecting the outward expressions of anger. "Raca" was a term which indicated a contempt of the person to whom it was applied: it means, "Thou empty worthless fellow." "Thou fool," was an expression that implied a great degree of indignation and abhorrence, "Thou reprobate villain." Such expressions therefore as these must of necessity be considered as violations of the commandment; because they manifest a total want of love and pity towards the person so addressed. But it

is

^c Mark iii. 5.

^d Eph. iv. 26.

is not every reproachful word that is sinful. St. Paul said, "O foolish Galatians:" are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" St. James makes use of a similar expression; "Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" Our blessed Lord spake occasionally with far greater severity: "O fools, and blind;" "ye hypocrites;" "ye serpents and generation of vipers." But in these things he spake as a Prophet, bearing special authority; and consequently, unless specially authorized like him, we are not at liberty in these respects to follow his example. The rule for us is plain: we may, like the Apostles, designate the characters of men by appropriate epithets; but we must never use any expression which implies a hatred or contempt of the person to whom it is addressed. If we do not strictly adhere to this rule, we violate the commandment.

Thus you see the *import* of the commandment. Let us next consider our Lord's explanation of,]

2. Its sanctions—

[We have observed, that the Pharisees, in their comments on this commandment, insisted almost exclusively on the temporal punishment annexed to the violation of it. Our Lord shewed them, that the principal judgments would be felt in the eternal world; and that not only the direct act of murder, but all those other evils which he had represented as breaches of the commandment, would there meet with deserved punishment. This he illustrated by a reference to the different kinds of punishment which were inflicted in their courts of justice. There were Courts, established in different parts of the land, consisting of twenty-three members, who had power to try causes, and to inflict capital punishment on the guilty: and the persons condemned by them, were *beheaded*. There was also a great court or council, called the Sanhedrim, consisting of seventy-two members, who took cognizance of the greatest crimes: and the persons condemned by them were *stoned*. But there were some offences for which people were condemned to be *burnt alive*^f: and these, it is thought, were executed in the valley of Hinnom. In that valley the people formerly had burned their children in sacrifice to Moloch: but, when the people were turned from that wicked idolatry, one method adopted for keeping them from returning to it was, to defile the place as much as possible, and to render it detestable in the eyes of the people. For this purpose, all the filth of the city was carried there to be consumed; and fires were kept there on purpose to consume^d it: and, it is probable, that

* Gal. iii. 1, 3.

^f Lev. xx. 14. & xxi. 9.

that that spot was selected as the fittest place of execution for all who were sentenced to be burnt alive. Now it is plain, that, of these three kinds of death, the last is far the most terrible: stoning was a more lingering death than beheading, and burning was still worse than stoning. A similar kind of gradation there will be in the punishments inflicted in the eternal world. Death, eternal death, will be the portion of all who die in their sins: but some will have a lighter, and others a heavier, weight of misery to sustain, in proportion to their respective degrees of guilt. "Those who are angry with their brother without a cause, will be in danger of the council," that is, of that lighter degree of misery, which may be compared to *beheading*. Those who suffer their anger to "break out into contemptuous expressions," and "say to their brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council;" and sustain a heavier punishment, answerable to *stoning*. And if any person shall entertain such rancour in his heart as to "say to his brother, Thou fool, he shall be in danger of hell fire," that is, of that heaviest of all punishments, answerable to the being *burnt alive* in the valley of Hinnom: hell fire being usually expressed, in the New Testament, by a word importing, "The fire in the land of Hinnom^g."

Thus our Lord shews what are to be regarded as violations of this commandment, and that every violation of it shall receive a recompence proportionable to its enormity.]

Having seen his exposition of the commandment, let us consider,

II. The general instruction which it conveys to us —

With the right exposition of the commandments every truth of the Gospel is intimately connected, We may learn from this especially,

1 The spirituality of the law—

[The law is not a mere letter, which imports nothing beyond the literal import of the words, but extends to all the thoughts and dispositions of the heart. It prohibits all tendencies towards the sin forbidden, and enjoins every virtue that is opposed to it. St. Paul speaks of this as a thing known and acknowledged: "We *know* that the law is spiritual^h." In his unconverted state, indeed, he did not know it: he had the same view of the commandments as other Pharisees had, and thought he had never violated them, at least not so as to be condemned by them: but when

^g See Doddridge's note on the text.

^h Rom. vii. 14.

when God shewed him the meaning of those words, "Thou shalt not covet," he saw that "the commandment" was, as David had long before represented it, "exceeding broadⁱ:" he saw that there was not an inclination of the mind, or an affection of the heart, which was not under its cognizance and controul; and, consequently, that he had violated it in ten thousand instances. This is the account which he himself gives us of his own experience: "I was alive without the law once; but, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died^k;" that is, Before I understood the law, I thought I had kept it, and should be saved by it; but when I saw its spirituality and extent, I was sensible that I was a condemned sinner, and could never be justified by my obedience to it.

It is remarkable, that God has taught us this very lesson from the commandment before us. Moses was the meekest man upon earth: yet on one occasion he transgressed against this commandment, and spake unadvisedly with his lips: "*Ye rebels*, shall we fetch you water out of this rock?" and then, in his anger, he struck the rock *twice*. Now for this single transgression God excluded him from the earthly Canaan^l. And what was the import of this dispensation? It was intended to teach us, that the law is violated as much by an angry word or temper, as by murder itself; that one single violation of it is sufficient to exclude us from the Land of Promise; and that, though it is of excellent use to conduct us through the wilderness, it can never bring us into Canaan: *that* is the work of Joshua^m, and of Joshua alone. Let us then learn this important lesson from the commandment before us; and be convinced, that there is no justification for us by the works of the law.]

2. The evil and danger of bad tempers—

[It is thought in general a sufficient excuse for passion, to say, That we are naturally quick and hasty; and, if a man do not long retain his anger, this hastiness of spirit is not considered, either by himself or others, as any great blemish in his character. But God does not judge so, when he tells us, that anger in the heart exposes us to his heavy displeasure, and that the saying to our brother 'Raca' puts us in danger of hell fire. Surely we must have very little considered the effects of anger, if we can think so light of the criminality attaching to it. See what murderous *purposes* issued from it in the heart of Davidⁿ! — — — and what
infernal

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 96.

^k Rom. vii. 7, 9.

^l Compare Numb. xx. 10—12. with Ps. cvi. 32, 33.

^m Joshua is the same name with Jesus, of whom Joshua was a type. Acts vii. 45. & Heb. iv. 8. in the Greek.

ⁿ 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

infernal *acts* were executed in consequence of it by the incensed sons of Jacob^o!— — Or let us look nearer home, and see how often it terminates in blows, in duels, and in death. Who will say, that “the feet of an angry man are not swift to shed blood?” If nothing but the declarations of God himself will satisfy us, let us attend to them: “He that hateth his brother, is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him^p :” and again, “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain^q.”

Hear ye then, ye “dealers in proud wrath;” hear what God himself speaks concerning you! Think it not a light matter to be angry with your wife, and children, and servants, on every occasion; and to be of such an irritable temper, that the smallest thing in the world suffices to put you in a passion. Whatever professions you may make of regard for religion, God tells you “not to deceive yourselves;” for that “no railer or reviler shall enter into his kingdom^r :” and such a disgrace does he consider you to his religion, that he bids his own people “not so much as to eat with you^s.”

You will say, “It is only with the lower class of people that I am angry; to my equals I am courteous enough.” What then, is not one man your “brother,” as well as another? Go and murder a poor man; and see whether the laws of the land will make any distinction: and, if they will not, much less will “God, with whom there is no respect of persons.” If you indulge anger in your heart, and express it with your lips, “hell fire” will be your portion, whatever be your own rank, and whether the objects of your anger be poor or rich.

If you would be Christians indeed, your habitual conduct must be agreeable to that precept; “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour,^u and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you^v.”]

3. The greatness of the Gospel salvation—

[Let any one judge himself by our Lord’s exposition of this commandment, and see how often he has been “in danger of the judgment, and the council; yea, and of hell fire itself.” Yet here is only one commandment; and that too considered only in a very partial way. What then must

^o Gen. xxxiv. 13, 25 – 31. with xlix. 5–7. ^p 1 John iii. 15.

^q Jam. i. 26.

^r 1 Cor. vi. 10.

^s 1 Cor. v. 10.

^t Eph. iv. 31, 32.

be the amount of our guilt, when tried by *all* the commandments? And if such be the guilt of every individual amongst us, what must be the guilt of the whole world? Yet this was the guilt which was laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and was expiated by his all-atoning sacrifice! How "mighty then must He be on whom such help was laid!" and how precious must that blood be which could wash away such loads of guilt! We do not in general consider this as we ought: if we did, we could not but be filled with wonder at the stupendous plan, which the Father laid, the Son executed, the Spirit revealed.

It is the full view of this subject that animates the heavenly hosts to sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing:" therefore, "blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever*." And were we also to meditate more on these things, we should oftener catch the fire, and sing with enraptured hearts "the song of Moses and the Lamb†."]

‡ Ps. lxxxix. 19.

* Rev. v. 12, 13.

† Rev. xv. 3.

DCLXIX.

THE NECESSITY OF SEEKING RECONCILIATION WITH MEN.

Matt. v. 23, 24. *Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

THE explanation which our Lord has given us of the sixth commandment, shews, that we are not to confine the import of the Commandments to the mere letter of them, but to regard them as extending to the words of our lips, and the dispositions of our hearts. Nor must we imagine, that they are intended solely to prohibit sin: they must be understood as inculcating all those virtues which are opposed to the sin forbidden. This is evident from the connexion in which our text stands with the preceding context. Our blessed Lord had declared, that a wrathful word

was in fact a species and degree of murder: and from thence he takes occasion to inculcate the necessity of exercising in every respect a spirit of love, so as, not only to entertain no anger in one's own heart against others, but so as not to leave room for the exercise of it in the hearts of others towards us. The direction which he gives us respecting it will lead us to shew,

I. The duty of seeking reconciliation with men—

Wild beasts are scarcely more prone to injure their own species, than man is to oppress and injure his fellow-man. Indeed, considering what tempers we have, and what tempers exist in others, and what frequent occasions of interference with each other must of necessity arise, it would be a miracle if any of us had so conducted himself on all occasions, that no brother should on any account "have ought against him." We apprehend that no one who knows any thing of his own heart, would profess himself so perfect, as never to have done towards another any thing differently from what he would have wished to be done towards himself. Supposing then that "a brother have ought against us," what is to be done? I answer,

1. We should be willing to see our fault—

[There is in us a self-love, which blinds our eyes, and prevents us from seeing our own defects. Whatever relates to ourselves, we view in a partial light; so that we scarce ever attach any material blame to ourselves. Every one complains of the injuries he receives, but not of the injuries he commits. Take the report of mankind respecting each other, and the world is full of injuries; but take each person's report of himself, and no occasion of complaint will be found to exist. But it would be far better to put ourselves in the place of those who are offended with us; and, instead of extenuating our own offences and aggravating theirs, to view the extenuations of theirs, and the aggravations of our own. *This* would be doing as we would be done unto; and, if the habit of it were universal, it would soon root out all contention from the world.]

2. We should be ready to ask pardon for it—

[*This* is a condescension to which men in general are very

very averse to stoop. They would regard it as an act of meanness and cowardice; and therefore, even when conscious that they are wrong, they will rather risk the loss of their lives than submit to it. But no man should be ashamed to make a suitable apology for any offence he may have committed. When the friends of Job had, even with a good intention, criminated him on account of supposed hypocrisy, God was incensed against them for their uncharitable conduct, and ordered them to make their acknowledgments to Job himself, and to intreat his intercession in their behalf. It was no excuse for them that they had been mistaken, or that they had intended well, or even that they had been actuated by a zeal for God: they had wounded the feelings, and defamed the character, of Job; and if ever they would obtain forgiveness from God, they must first of all ask forgiveness from their injured friend^a. Thus must we do: it is an act of justice which we owe to man; and an act of obedience which we owe to God.]

3. We should be desirous to make reparation for it—

[This was expressly required under the law^b: and it was practised under the Gospel. No sooner was Zaccheus converted to the faith, than he engaged to restore fourfold to any person whom in his unconverted state he had defrauded^c. And it is in vain to affect penitence, if we be not unfeignedly determined to make reparation, as far as is in our power, for any injury we may have done. Who would give credit to a man for penitence, whilst he wilfully retained the goods that he had stolen? Sincere contrition would urge him to undo whatever he had done amiss. And the same principle would produce the same effects in every person under heaven.]

Such is our duty towards an offended brother. We now proceed to state,

II. The importance of it in order to our acceptance with God—

The command here given, to suspend the exercise of a solemn duty to God till we shall have performed this duty to man, shews,

1. That no duties whatever can supersede the necessity of it—

[It is here taken for granted, that men will bring their gifts to God's altar, or, in other words, will draw nigh to him in the use of all his appointed ordinances. But will

works

^a Job xlii. 7, 8.

^b Lev. vi. 2—6.

^c Luke xix. 8.

works of piety procure us a dispensation from the duties of the second table? Will the making of long prayers be any compensation for devouring widows' houses; or the paying tithe of mint and anise and cummin atone for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth? No such commutation will be admitted by God; no such reserves allowed: his word to us, under all such circumstances, is, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."}]

2. That no duties whatever will be accepted without it—

[A person is represented here as already with his offering before God's altar. But what says the word of God unto him? Finish thine offering to me, and then go and be reconciled to thy brother? No: it is, "Go thy way;" depart from my altar; leave thy gift there, that it may be ready for thee to offer when thou art reconciled to thy brother: but do not for a moment think of approaching me with acceptance, whilst thy brother's rights are overlooked. "The prayer of the upright is doubtless God's delight:" but, when presented by one who "regards iniquity in his heart, it not only shall not be heard," but it shall be held in utter "abomination^d." Hear how solemnly God protests against all such hypocritical services^e—— It is not in the power of words to express more sovereign contempt, or more rooted abhorrence, of such services, than is conveyed in these passages: and we may be assured, that if we attempt to draw nigh to God, either at his table or at the footstool of his grace, he will spurn us from him with indignation. Let us be ever so urgent in our supplications, his only answer will be, "Go thy way."

Let us not however be misunderstood on this subject: we are not to imagine, that the circumstance of our being at variance with a brother is any excuse for staying away from the Lord's table: (it were strange indeed if a want of love to man would excuse a want of piety to God:) this is certainly not the meaning of our text: the meaning is, that, as we cannot be accepted of God in such a state, it becomes us without delay to seek reconciliation with our offended brother.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. The necessity of frequent self-examination—

[It is here supposed that a person may be living in the exercise of religious duties, and, without being conscious of his danger, may be in a state wherein neither his person
nor

^d Prov. xv. 8. & xxi. 27.

^e Isai. i. 11—15. Am. v. 21—24.

nor his services can be accepted of God: he goes to the altar of his God as usual, and there recollects that his brother has some cause of complaint against him. Alas! there are many such self-deceiving people in the Christian world at this time. But how terrible! and they continue in their delusions till God himself shall bring their sins to remembrance at his judgment-seat! How dreadful will it then be to be told, "Go thy way!" Let us then live in the habit of daily self-examination: let us not leave any of our ways unnoticed, lest some hidden evil remain unrepented of, and "separate between us and our God" for ever. Especially when about to come to the supper of our Lord, let us try our ways with more than common jealousy, according to that advice of the Apostle, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him come!" Let us go back to our early days, and ask, Whom have we offended? whom defrauded? whom calumniated? whom encouraged in the ways of sin, or discouraged in the ways of piety and virtue? And, whilst we are careful to wash away our stains in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, let us be no less careful to obtain forgiveness of man, and to remedy the evils which we are unable to recall.]

2. The necessity of cultivating a humble spirit—

[It is pride which renders us so averse to ask forgiveness of a fellow-creature. But we have no alternative: if we will not seek reconciliation with an offended brother, we shall not obtain it with an offended God. Let us only get our spirits humbled with a sense of sin, and all the difficulty will vanish. We shall even feel a pleasure in making any acknowledgment which may tend to restore harmony and love. Even, if we are not conscious of having given any just occasion of offence, we shall not be satisfied, whilst we see a brother alienated from us: we shall be anxious to find the cause of his displeasure; to explain any thing which he may have misapprehended, and alter any thing he may have disapproved. In short, if the Gospel had its due effect upon us, we should, as far as our influence extended, convert this wilderness into another paradise. Our "swords would immediately be turned into plough-shares;" and "the wolf and the lamb would dwell together" in perfect amity: there would be "none to hurt or to destroy in all God's holy mountain." O that we could see such a state existing all around us! Let us at least endeavour to produce it in our respective circles. Let us appreciate as we ought the comfort of love, and the excellency of a Christian spirit. And let us seek that "wisdom from above, which is first pure, then

then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy^z.”]

^z Jam. iii. 17.

DCLXX.

CHRISTIANS THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

Matt. v. 13. *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

LITTLE do the world think how much they are indebted to those very saints whom they “revile and persecute for righteousness’ sake^a.” The extirpation of them (which is so much desired by many) would leave the world an entire mass of corruption, without any thing to heal its disorders, or to stop its progress towards utter destruction. Were they removed out of it, the rest would soon become as Sodom and Gomorrah^b. The representation given of them in the text fully justifies this idea. They are called “the salt of the earth.” This, of course, must be understood of those only who have the spirit of religion in them: for all others, whatever they may possess, are as vile and worthless as the real Christians are good and excellent.

The words before us will lead us to consider,

I. The worth and excellence of truly spiritual Christians—

The use of salt, as intimated in this expression of our Lord, is to keep other things from putrefaction and corruption.

This is the office that has been executed by all the saints of old—

[View them from the beginning; and they will all be found active in their generation, and zealous in benefiting the world around them. Noah preached to the Antediluvians an hundred and twenty years, indefatigably exerting himself to

^a ver. 11.

^b Isai. i. 9.

to bring them to repentance. Lot, in Sodom, "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds," and strove to turn the people from their horrible abominations. All the Prophets in successive ages laboured in the same blessed work, using all their efforts to lead their hearers to the knowledge of the only true God, and to an obedience to his holy laws. How the Apostles acted in relation to this, it is needless to observe. They lived for no other end, but to make known the way of life, and to "turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

All, indeed, were not favoured with the same success. Those who preceded the Saviour, rather sowed the seed, than reaped the harvest: but his Disciples, through the influence of the Spirit of God upon their labours, were instrumental to the conversion of thousands and of millions; all of whom in their respective spheres endeavoured to disseminate the same principles, and to spread "the *savour* of the knowledge of Christ" wherever they went. Take only one man, the apostle Paul; and who shall say how much corruption he was the means of preventing in the world? — — —]

This is the office which every Christian, according to his ability, still executes —

[Ministers labour for this end in the word and doctrine — — — and private individuals feel themselves bound to co-operate with them, yea, I may say, to be "fellow-workers also with God." No one who has received the grace of God in truth, will "live any longer unto himself:" he will seek to glorify his God, and to do good to those around him. Has he any relations, a father, a mother, a wife, a child, going on in ignorance and sin? he will endeavour by all possible means to rectify their dispositions, and to guide their feet into the way of peace. He will not say with himself, I am but as a grain of salt, and therefore can do *no* good: he will thankfully employ his influence, how small soever it may be, for the benefit of those to whom it will extend. Even the poorest have access to some poor neighbour like themselves: and the resolution of the weakest will be like that of the Church of old, "Draw *me*, and *we* will run after thee;" that is, "Draw *me*, and I will not come alone, but will bring all I can along with *me*."

And shall this be thought a small matter? No, surely: for if a Christian be instrumental, even in the course of his whole life, to convert one single person from the error of his ways, he has effected a good, which exceeds in value
the

the whole material world: for he has "saved a soul from death, and covered a multitude of sins^d."

This is the truly spiritual Christian, a man of great worth and excellence: but all who profess religion are not of this stamp: the text itself declares that there are some of a very different character; and that nothing can exceed,

II. The worthlessness of those who have not the savour of religion in their souls—

Salt that has lost its savour is here said to be "good for nothing; but is trodden under foot of men." This shews the desperate state of those who are not truly alive to God. Their prospects are indeed gloomy in relation to,

1. Their personal recovery—

[Salt that has lost its savour, *cannot* by any means be restored to its former pungency. And thus it is with those who, after some experience of the power of godliness, have made shipwreck of their faith and of a good conscience. Doubtless, "with God all things are possible;" and therefore He *can* restore the most determined apostate: but there is very little reason to hope that he ever *will*; since he has told us, that such an one shall be given over to final impenitence^e— — —

The state of one who has merely declined in religion is certainly not so desperate; but still it is truly deplorable. If a man had never known any thing of religion, it might be hoped that the truths of the Gospel might influence his mind; but if he be already acquainted with those truths, and they be not able to *preserve* him, how can it be hoped that they shall have efficacy to *restore* him? Whilst "the heart is yet tender," the Gospel is mighty in operation; because God accompanies it with his power from on high; but when "the heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," and the Spirit of God has withdrawn his agency, there is great reason to fear that the man "will draw back unto perdition." How solemn are the admonitions given on this subject to the Church at Ephesus^f, and to that at Sardis^g! Let every one then who has declined in religious exercises and enjoyments, even though his declensions be ever so secret, tremble, lest that threatening be fulfilled in him,
"The

^d Jam. v. 19, 20.

^e Heb. vi. 4—6. & x. 26, 27. 2 Pet. ii. 20—22.

^f Rev. ii. 4, 5.

^g Rev. iii. 1—3.

"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways^h."]]

2. Their Ministerial usefulness—

"All who have received the gift, are bound to minister the same to others, as good stewards of the manifold grace of Godⁱ." But the man that has lost the savour of religion in his own soul, is ill qualified for this: he has not *inclination* to do it, he has not *courage*, he has not *ability*. When religion flourished in his soul, he could converse upon it with pleasure: "Out of the abundance of his heart his mouth would freely speak." But now he can converse on any other subject rather than that: he finds no satisfaction in maintaining fellowship even with the saints: it is not to be wondered at therefore that he has no disposition to instruct the ignorant, and reform the wicked.^{*} Indeed, he is afraid lest that proverb should be retorted upon him, "Physician, heal thyself:" and his own conscience will remonstrate with him in the energetic language of the Apostle, "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself^k?"— — — And though no change has taken place in his intellect in reference to earthly things, his understanding becomes clouded in relation to spiritual things: his *gifts* in a great measure vanish together with his grace: he once could speak and pray with fluency; but now his mouth is shut: and he experiences the truth of that singular declaration, "From him that hath not (that hath not improved his talent) shall be taken away even that which he hath^l."

But it is observed of the salt, not only that it is "good for nothing," with respect to its primary uses of keeping other things from putrefaction, but that it is "not fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill^m." The fact is, that salt, when destitute of its proper qualities, has a tendency rather to produce sterility than to promote vegetation, if it be cast upon the land. This is intimated in many passages of Scriptureⁿ. — — — And such is the effect produced by those who have lost the power of godliness, and departed from God: they cast a stumbling-block before men, and "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of." The world may do what they please, and the individuals only are blamed; but let any one who professes religion do any thing amiss, and religion itself must be accountable for it, and the name of God is blasphemed on his account. This indeed is most unreasonable and absurd: nevertheless so it is: and a most aggravated

^h Prov. xiv. 14.

ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 10.

^k Rom. ii. 21—24.

^l Matt. xiii. 12.

^m Luke xiv. 35.

ⁿ Judges ix. 45. Jer. xvii. 6. Ezek. xlvii. 11. and particularly Ps. cvii. 34. the marginal reading. The *Salt Sea* is the *Dead Sea*.

aggravated woe is thereby entailed on all who occasion such offences^o.]

3. Their final acceptance—

[Even here they are rejected both by God and man. Those who walk consistently, are hated and despised by the ungodly world; but those who walk inconsistently, are despised a thousand times more; and this God has ordained as a just punishment for their treachery^p. As for his own abhorrence of them, it is scarcely possible for language to express it more strongly than he has declared it^q. Moreover, if they repent not, the same indignation will pursue them in the eternal world. What reception they will then meet with at his hands, he has plainly warned them^r. And the saints with whom they associated here, will then disown them, and cast them out of their society^s: yea, the very Heathen who walked agreeably to the light that they enjoyed, will be admitted into bliss, whilst the lifeless professor of religion, who brought forth no fruit to perfection, will be banished from it with abhorrence^t. So true is that expression in our text, “They shall be trodden under foot of men!”]

Seeing then that the power of godliness is of such importance, we call upon you all,

1. To seek it—

[It is not a lifeless formal religion that will avail for your salvation. The command of God to every one of us is, “Have salt in yourselves.” The distinction between the true Christian and the self-deceiver is, that the one “savours the things of the Spirit,” which the other does not^u. We must “delight ourselves in God,” or it will be in vain to hope that ever he will delight in us.]

2. To preserve it—

[The “salt may soon lose its savour.” Religion is not like the sculptor’s work, which if left ever so long remains in the state it was; but like a stone rolled up a hill, which will descend again as soon as the impelling force is withdrawn. The stony-ground and thorny-ground hearers shew, that we are prone to depart from God, or to rest in a carnal state whilst maintaining outwardly a spiritual profession. It is a melancholy, and an undeniable fact, that many do “begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh.”

Let

^o Matt. xviii. 7.

^p Mal. ii. 8, 9.

^q Rev. iii. 15, 16.

^r Ps. l. 16—22.

^s Luke xiii. 28.

^t Rom. ii. 27.

^u Mark ix. 50.

^x Rom. viii. 5. *φρονέουσιν, sapiunt*, Beza. See also Rom. ii. 28, 29.

671.] CHRISTIANS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. 91

Let us then “stir up the gift of God that is in us,” as we would stir a languishing fire; that we “lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.”]

3. To diffuse it—

[We must never forget the office which God has assigned us in our respective spheres. The treasure committed to us earthen vessels, is not for ourselves only, but to enrich others. “Our speech should always be with grace seasoned with salt^z.” Let us then exert ourselves to the utmost of our power to *instruct the rising generation*———to *reform the habits of the world*———to *send the Gospel to the Heathen*———and to impart to all within our reach the knowledge and salvation of God^a.]

^y 2 John ver. 8.

^z Col. iv. 6. Eph. iv. 29.

^a If this be a subject for MISSIONS, or *Bible Society*, or *Sunday Schools*, or for *visiting the sick*, or *reformation of manners*, the appropriate idea should be exclusively insisted on.

DCLXXI.

CHRISTIANS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Matt. v. 14—16. *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

IF we had not been authorized by God himself, we should never have presumed to designate the saints by such honourable appellations as are unreservedly given to them in the Scriptures. Of all the objects in the visible creation, the sun is the most glorious; nor is there any thing, either in this terraqueous globe or in the firmament of heaven, which does not partake of its benign influence: yet even to that are the saints compared; “Ye are the light of the world.”

That all the parts of our text may come easily and profitably under our view, we shall consider,

I. The office to which God has destined his people—

Strictly

Strictly speaking, neither Prophets nor Apostles could arrogate to themselves the honour which is here in a subordinate sense conferred on all the saints: it belongs exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “The Sun of Righteousness^a,” and who says of himself, “I am the light of the world^b.” St. John, speaking of the Baptist, (who was greater than all the Prophets,) expressly declares, that “*he* was not that light; but that *Christ* was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world^c.” In this view, the name of *stars* would rather befit us, because we shine only with a borrowed lustre; reflecting merely the rays which we have received from the Lord Jesus: but, as exhibiting to the world all the true light that is in it, God has been pleased to dignify us with that higher name, “The light of the world.” He has sent his people to fulfil that office in the *moral*, which the sun performs in the *natural* world.

1. He has qualified them for it—

[There is a light in their minds, which reason and philosophy cannot impart, and which no man can possess, unless it has been given from above^d. “God has shined into their hearts to give it them, even the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^e.” This is that mystery which was hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to the saints^f. The meanest of his people are in this respect wiser than the wisest of unenlightened men, because they are taught of God^g. We are aware that this is an offensive truth; and that the learned will ever reply in the language of the offended Pharisees, “Are we blind also^h?” But it is no less true at this day than it was in former ages, that “God has hid his Gospel from the wise and prudent, and revealed it unto babes; even so, for so it seemeth good in his sightⁱ.”

Now this qualifies his people to instruct others. It is possible enough that they may be very ignorant in all other things; but of these things “they have the witness in themselves,”

^a Mal. iv. 2.

^b John viii. 12.

^c John i. 8, 9.

^d 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^e 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^f Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

^g John vi. 45.

^h John ix. 39.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 25, 26.

themselves^k," and therefore are enabled to speak of them just as they do of the things about which they are daily conversant. They may not speak scientifically about their bodily feelings; but when they tell you of their wants and their supplies, or of the diseases and the remedies which they have found effectual to remove them, they know whereof they affirm. Thus respecting the great truths of the Gospel, they are enabled to speak from their own experience; and the greatest philosopher in the universe may sit at their feet and learn.]

2. He has ordained them to it—

[It is a favourite idea with many, that they are to be religious, but that their religion is not to be seen. Under the pretence of hating ostentation, they conform to every practice of the world, and are in no respect distinguishable from the mere decent moralist. But, when they think that a man may serve God faithfully and yet avoid the notice of those around them, they only deceive their own souls. For,

In the first place, *they cannot do it if they would*. "A city that is set on an hill *cannot* be hid." If whilst the world around them are "living after the flesh," and "walking in the broad road that leadeth to destruction," they "walk after the Spirit," and confine themselves to "the narrow way that leadeth unto life," how *can* it be that they should escape notice? Their whole spirit and temper and conduct differ from the world, as much as light from darkness. We will suppose, their light is but small; and if exhibited before the meridian sun, it might easily be overlooked; but the smallest taper attracts notice when shining in the midst of darkness: and this is precisely their case: the splendor of their conduct may not be such as of itself to command admiration; yet it cannot but be seen by reason of the surrounding darkness. But,

In the next place, *they ought not to do it if they could*. "Men do not light a candle to put it under a bushel, but to give light to all that are in the house:" nor does God "bring his people out of darkness into his marvellous light" solely for their own sakes, but "that they may shew forth the praises of Him that hath called them^l," and diffuse the light which they have received. They are bound therefore, by every tie of duty and gratitude, to make him known to others, and to advance as much as possible his glory in the world. Moreover, their fellow-creatures also have a claim upon them. Who that should see a blind man walking on the brink of a precipice, would not feel himself bound to

^k 1 John v. 10.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 9.

to warn him of his danger; and account himself guilty of a murderous cruelty towards him, if the man should perish through his neglect? If then we should feel it a duty to give him the advantage of our superior light in relation to his bodily welfare, how much more ought we to do it in relation to his soul! The command given to every enlightened soul, is, “Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee^a.”]

This leads us to speak of,

II. The duty resulting from it—

[That we are not to do any thing from ostentation or vain-glory is certain: whatever proceeds from such a principle is altogether hateful in the sight of God. They who seek the applause of man must expect no other reward. But we are not to be so restrained by these considerations as to decline that course of action which will bring glory to God. On the contrary, we should “make our light to shine before men,” and “so” shine, as to compel all who behold it “to glorify our Father which is in heaven.”]

It may be asked, How can any conduct of ours accomplish this? I answer,

First, *it may shew men the unreasonableness of their prejudices.*—All manner of prejudices are entertained against the Gospel; and all that we can say is insufficient to remove them. But what we do has a very powerful effect: it will often “put to silence the ignorance of foolish menⁿ,” and make them ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ^o — — —

Next, *it may lead them to embrace the Gospel.*—The Apostle speaks of husbands, who never would have attended to the written or preached word, being won by the good conversation of their wives^p. From the history of the Church in all ages, we know that there are many who owe their first impressions of religion to the consistent conduct of some eminent saint; nor can we doubt but that if the dispositions and character of religious people more uniformly corresponded with their holy profession, “the word would have an abundantly freer course,” and would be much sooner glorified throughout the world.

Lastly, *it cannot fail of stimulating many to increasing activity.*—The force of example is exceeding great. Many, for want of associates in well-doing, are discouraged, and attempt but little, because they think that but little can be accomplished. But, when they see a person more abundant in labours than themselves, they are stirred up to a holy emulation; they blush at the view of their own unprofitableness,

^a Isai. lx. 1. ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 15. ^o 1 Pet. iii. 16. ^p ib. ver. 1, 2.

ness, and whilst they are thankful to God who has given such grace unto men, they strive with redoubled ardour to serve and glorify their God.]

We shall CONCLUDE this subject with shewing,

1. How we may become lights to the world—

[Simple as this question may appear, there are few who would answer it aright. Almost all would propose to attain this distinction by *doing*; and would be shocked at being told that it must be attained by *believing*: yet that is the very way by which our blessed Lord has taught us to seek it: “Believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.” This, of course, is not to be understood as though a bare assent to any truths whatever would sanctify the soul: it is to be understood as directing us to the Gospel, and to the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in it. To believe in the light, is to look for salvation entirely through Him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation for sin; it is to live altogether by faith on him, and to make him our ALL in all. This would render our union with Christ productive; and would lead to our perfect renovation after the Divine image. Then should we “shine indeed as lights in a dark world;” and God himself would be glorified in us.]

2. What we should do if we have already attained that honour—

[Remember that the eyes of all are upon you, and that God’s glory in the world is very greatly affected by your conduct. Any fault in you will soon be noticed by the world. They who pay little regard to the stars that shine in their orbits, will yet be observant enough of a falling star: and, in like manner, they who overlook the radiance of ten thousand saints, will mark with triumph the fall of a professor, and derive from it an argument against all serious religion. Be on your guard then against every thing which may either eclipse your light, or cause it to shine with diminished splendor——— Be earnest also to get forward in your Christian course. The brightest of us emits only as yet the faint gleam of early dawn: “our profiting must continually appear;” and “our path be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day”———]

† John xii. 36.

• Phil. ii. 15, 16.

• Prov. iv. 18.

DCLXXII.

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS CONFIRMED BY
CHRIST.

Matt. v. 17, 18. *Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

TO have just sentiments on religion is a matter of incalculable importance. Whilst we are mistaken respecting any fundamental truths, we not only lose the benefit and comfort of those truths, but are in danger of rejecting them when proposed to our consideration, and enlisting ourselves amongst the avowed enemies of the Gospel. The Jews were almost universally expecting a temporal Messiah. Hence when our blessed Lord appeared in such mean circumstances, and inculcated doctrines so opposite to their carnal expectations, the people thought either that he was an impostor who deceived them, or that he was come to subvert and destroy all that had been delivered to them by their forefathers. Our blessed Lord anticipated and obviated their objections: "Think not," says he, "that I am come to destroy the law and the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

By "the Law and the Prophets," I understand, that system of religion which the moral law inculcated, and all the Prophets enforced. To establish and confirm these was the great end of our Saviour's advent. He has confirmed them as to the great scope of all that they have spoken in reference to,

I. The way of salvation—

The way of salvation, as revealed in the Old Testament, is by faith in the promised Messiah—

[The moral law proclaimed this. The moral law, it is true, said, "Do this and live^a." But it was never the intent of the moral law to put men upon working out their salvation by their obedience to its commands. The law could never
give

^a Rom. x. 5.

give life to man since the fall. It could only shew him his duty, and thunder out its curses against him for his manifold transgressions. It required perfect and perpetual obedience; in default of which, it doomed him to everlasting destruction^b. Thus by its unbending severity it compelled every one that was under it to seek salvation in some other way. It shewed to men the necessity of a Saviour, and thus prepared them for the manifestation of Christ by the Gospel. This is the very account given of it by St. Paul, who sums up his testimony in these significant expressions, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith^c."

The *ceremonial* law held forth the remedy, of which the *moral* law declared our need. All its sacrifices directed men to that great Sacrifice which should in due time be offered on the cross: whilst the brazen serpent, the scape-goat, and all the various lustrations, displayed the efficacy of that remedy, and encouraged penitents to accept it. That the ceremonial law was intended to answer this end, we are sure; because our Saviour himself and his Apostles constantly appealed to it, as prefiguring Christ, who is expressly said to be "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^d."

Precisely to the same effect is the testimony of all the Prophets. Who can read the 53d chapter of Isaiah, and not see that salvation is to be obtained through the atoning blood of Christ? We see him "wounded for our transgressions," and all "our iniquities laid on him," in order that we may be "healed by his stripes." Similar to this is the declaration of Daniel, who says, that Christ should "finish transgression, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness." In a word, "To him," says the Apostle, "give all the Prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins^e:" and again, "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being *witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe^f."]

And what, we ask, is the way of salvation in the New Testament?

[Has the Lord Jesus Christ put aside this way of salvation? Has he not rather established it beyond all possibility of doubt? Hear his own words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: *no man cometh unto the Father but*

by

^b Deut. xxvii. 26. with Gal. iii. 10.

^c Gal. iii. 21—24.

^d Rom. x. 4.

^e Acts x. 43.

^f Rom. iii. 21, 22,

by me." To cite all his declarations upon this subject would detain us too long: suffice it to say, that he speaks of his "blood as shed for the remission of sins," and "his life as given to be a ransom for many;" and declares, that, by being "lifted up upon the cross," he is qualified and empowered to "draw all men unto him."]

Thus far then we have seen that Christ has confirmed the Law and the Prophets, as far as relates to the way of salvation. Let us now mark the same in reference to,

II. The path of duty—

The ten commandments were given as a rule of conduct to the Jews—

[This summary of religious duties is emphatically called, 'The Law.' It was given by God in the most solemn manner, and enjoined without exception on the whole nation. The Prophets, in their respective ages and places, maintained the authority of this law, and laboured to bring the people into a conformity to its precepts.]

And what other rule is there prescribed to us?

[The Lord Jesus Christ has neither added to the ten commandments, nor taken from them. He has freed them from the corrupt glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, and has explained them according to their spiritual import. He has also specified certain duties which were not so clearly seen under the Mosaic dispensation, and has added new motives to the performance of them. But he has enjoined nothing which is not comprehended in one of those two commandments, that of "loving God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength," and that of loving our neighbour as ourselves. On the other hand, he has bound upon us these duties in the most solemn manner; and told us, that he will estimate our character, not by the zeal with which we "cry Lord, Lord," but by the care and uniformity with which we keep his commandments?]

Here then is proof sufficient, that our Lord has not destroyed the Law and the Prophets, or in the slightest degree weakened our obligations to obey them. There are some professors of religion, and indeed not a few, who think that Christ has set aside the law as a rule of life. But they labour under a dangerous, yea, a fatal error. When they say that we are released from the law as a covenant of works, they are right: but so were Believers under the Old Testament. When they say that we are released from the whole

whole ceremonial law, they are right: but we must still observe every part of it in a spiritual manner, presenting Christ as our sacrifice, washing daily in the fountain of his blood, and "cleansing ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, that we may perfect holiness in the fear of God." But when they speak of being released from the law as a rule of life, they open the flood-gates of licentiousness^h: and were it not that some of them, as we hope, have more piety in their practice than in their principles, they would have just reason to tremble for their stateⁱ. The truth is, that the advancing of our souls in holiness was a very principal object of Christ's incarnation and death^k. And "that very grace of God which bringeth salvation," so far from annulling any single command of God, itself "teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."]

This subject is of peculiar use,

1. To rectify our views—

[As for those who think that salvation is by the works of the law, we shall pass them over on the present occasion; praying only that God may open their eyes ere it be too late. But there are many thoughtful and intelligent persons, and not altogether destitute of piety, who imagine, that Christ has lowered the demands of the moral law, and purchased for us the liberty of being saved by a new law of sincere obedience: they think that for his sake our sincere obedience will be accepted, instead of perfect obedience; and that the defects of our obedience will be made up by the merits of Jesus Christ.

To such persons I would say, Read the words of our text. Christ says he did *not* come to destroy the law; and you affirm that he *did*; that he has softened its rigours, and dispensed with those high attainments which the perfect law of God requires. You will reply perhaps, If these things be not dispensed with, how are we to be saved? I answer, They are not dispensed with, no, not one of them: it is as much our duty to fulfil the whole law of God as it was Adam's duty in paradise: nor, if we would be saved by the law, can we be saved on any lower terms. But of salvation by the law we must not entertain a thought: we are condemned by the law, and must flee as condemned sinners to Jesus Christ, that he may wash us from our sins in his blood, and clothe us in his own unspotted robe of righteousness and salvation. Some will exclaim, What

new

^h Rom. iii. 31.

ⁱ See ver. 19.

^k Tit. ii. 14.

new doctrine is this? I answer, this was the way of salvation revealed to Adam after the Fall; and it has been continued in all successive ages, till Christ himself came. Then was this mystery more clearly revealed to the world; and from henceforth the voice of God to every human Being is, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Lay aside then your erroneous notions respecting a mitigated law and sincere obedience; and seek salvation in God's only dear Son, in whom alone it can be found¹.]

2. To regulate our lives—

[Whilst some persons object to salvation by faith alone as a licentious doctrine, others complain of us as raising the standard of holiness so high, that none, except a few devotees, can possibly attain it. But I would ask these objectors, Which of God's laws are we authorized to set aside? Which are we even suffered to palliate and soften? Our blessed Lord has, with the strongest possible asseveration, said, that "not so much as a jot or tittle of the law shall ever pass away:" how then can *we* presume to say, *It shall* pass away? Suppose *we* do lower the standard of obedience in compliance with your wishes, what will it profit you, unless *HE* do it also? We should only deceive you, and ruin ourselves together with you. But you will say, "It is hard to have so much required of us." Well, suppose it be hard; if it be required, we must do it: our only alternative is, to obey or perish. But "there is not any one of his commandments grievous:" on the contrary, they all together form "a light and easy yoke;" and so far are they from being deemed too strict by any real Christian, that there is not a true Christian in the world that would wish any one of the commandments to require less than it does. A spiritual man does not complain of the strictness of the law, but of the wickedness of his own heart: and his desire is, not to have the commandments of God lowered to his attainments, but his attainments elevated to the utmost height of God's commandments.

Let this then be the desire and endeavour of us all: let there be no sin harboured, not even in thought; nor any duty neglected, whatever difficulties we may have to encounter, or whatever trials to endure. If we "have a hope of salvation through Christ, we must purify ourselves even as he is pure."]

¹ Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11,

DCLXXIII.

THE DANGER OF LITTLE SINS.

Matt. v. 19. *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

IT must be confessed, that amongst those who profess a high regard for the Gospel, there are some who speak of it in terms, which, to say the least, have an antinomian and licentious aspect. In their zeal against self-righteousness, they are apt to represent the law as altogether abolished: knowing that we are no longer under the law as a covenant, they express themselves as if we were freed from it also as a rule of life. But we must never forget that the Gospel is “a doctrine according to godliness;” and that “the law, so far from being made void through faith, is established by it.” In the words preceding the text, our blessed Lord had said, that “he came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them:” and in the words before us, he teaches us to infer from thence the undiminished authority of the sacred code.

To elucidate his assertions, we observe,

- I. That the commandments of God are universally to be obeyed—

It is certain that some commandments are of more importance than others—

[There can be no doubt but that the moral précepts, which are founded in our relation to God and to each other, are of more importance than the positive institutions, which are founded only in the sovereign will of God. Our Lord himself, comparing the divine institution of paying tithes with the exercise of judgment, mercy, and faith, calls the latter “the *weightier* matters of the law:” though at the same time he determines, “These ought ye to have done; and not to leave the other undone.”

The positive institutions may even be set aside, if they interfere with our discharge of moral duties. A strict observance

observance of the Sabbath is enjoined: but, if a work of necessity or of mercy demand our attention, we are at liberty to engage in it, notwithstanding we thereby violate the sacred rest of the Sabbath: for God has said, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Indeed, even in the moral law itself, there is a difference between the duties of the first and of the second table; those which relate to God being more important than those which relate to man. Hence our Lord says, that "to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, is the first and *great* commandment."]

But the authority on which every one of them stands is the same—

[God is the great lawgiver: and whatever his command be, it is, as long as it is in force, binding upon all to whom it is given. We are no more at liberty to abrogate one than to set aside another. If we allowedly violate any one of them, we do, in effect, violate them all^a. If any two be absolutely incompatible, the positive precept, as I have observed, gives way, and ceases for the time to be a command. So if two moral precepts, such as that of obeying a parent, and of obeying God, be irreconcilable, obedience to God is then of superior and paramount obligation. God himself has assigned limits to man's authority, beyond which we are not commanded to obey him. Man cannot dispense with any of the divine commandments: they can be repealed by that authority only which first established them. Neither in theory nor in practice are we at liberty to make them void: we must both "do" them ourselves, "and teach" the observance of them to others. We must not add any thing to them, nor take any thing from them. The injunctions which God has given us on this head are strict and solemn^b: and, if we presume to violate them, it is at the peril of our souls^c.]

It is intimated that some will both "do and teach" them: which leads us to observe,

II. That an unreserved respect for all of them is characteristic of the true Christian—

Ungodly men have but little reverence for the Divine commands—

[The Pharisees of old laid a far greater stress on ceremonial than on moral duties; on "washing pots and cups," than on cleansing the heart: and they actually made void some

^a Jam. ii. 10, 11.

^b Prov. xxx. 5, 6. Deut. xii. 22.

^c Rev. xxii. 18, 19. Deut. xxvii. 26.

some of the commandments by their traditions^d. The Papists do the same at this day, denying the sacramental cup to the laity, commanding the consecrated wafer to be worshipped, and granting pardons and indulgences to those who are able to pay for them. Would to God there were no such impieties among Protestants also! It is true, we do not acknowledge any power in the Pope to dispense with the laws of God: but we take the power into our own hands, and deal as freely with the commands of God as ever the Pope himself can do. One commandment is deemed uncertain, another unreasonable, another unnecessary; and all are reduced to the standard which we ourselves approve. As for the penalties with which they are enforced, "we puff at them," and assure both ourselves and others that they shall never be executed.]

But the true Christian dares not thus to insult his God—

[It is his habit to "tremble at the word^e." When once he hears, "Thus saith the Lord," his mouth is shut; and he sets himself immediately to obey the divine command. Instead of complaining that "any commandment is grievous^f," he loves the whole law; he accounts it "holy, and just, and good." He would not have any part of it lowered in its demands on any account^g. His desire is rather to have his soul "cast into the very mould of the Gospel^h," and to be transformed perfectly into the image of his God. His prayer is, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamedⁱ:" let me "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^k" — — —]

The Christian's disposition towards the commands of God ought to be cultivated by every one of us, since it is certain—

III. That on such a respect for them depends our everlasting happiness—

Nothing less than this will suffice to prove our sincerity—

[It is allowed, without any great difficulty, that heinous violations of God's law will affect our eternal state: but smaller transgressions are considered as of but little consequence. But this does not accord with our Lord's assertions in the text: There we are told that the breach of *one* single law will be fatal, yea, though it be *the least* of

^d Matt. xxiii. 25—28. & xv. 3—6.

^e Isai. lxvi. 2.

^f 1 John v. 3. ^g Ps. cxix. 128. ^h Rom. vi. 17. the Greek.

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 80. ^k Col. iv. 12. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

of all the commandments of God. We are not to understand that the unintentional and unallowed defects in our obedience will prove fatal to us; for who then could be saved? but any evil which we *allow* and *justify*, or, as the text expresses it, which we “do and teach,” will certainly exclude us from the kingdom of heaven. The text might seem to import that such conduct would only diminish the degree of our happiness in heaven: but our Lord elsewhere warns us, that it will entirely exclude us from heaven; and that our only alternative is, either to part with sin altogether, or to suffer the penalty of sin, eternal death¹.]

But where obedience is unreserved, it will receive a glorious recompence from God—

[That there is no *merit* in our obedience, is allowed: but that our obedience shall receive a reward of grace, every page of the Inspired Volume declares—— The more perfect our conformity to God’s law, and the more energetic our maintenance of its authority have been, the higher testimonies of God’s approbation we shall most assuredly receive; and our exaltation in heaven shall be proportionably “great.” Peculiar sanctity and zeal may subject us to reproach from men; but it will meet with honour from God: for he has said, “Them that honour me, I will honour.”]

LEARN then from hence the importance of,

1. A renewed heart—

[The unregenerate heart “neither is, nor can be, subject to God’s law^m.” We “must be born again,” and be “renewed in the spirit of our minds,” before we can truly say, “I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is within my heartⁿ.”—— Let us then seek to be made “new creatures in Christ Jesus.” Then shall we be prepared both to “do” the commandments ourselves, and to “teach” them to those around us.]

2. A faithful Ministry—

[Many, in fact, say unto their Ministers, “Prophecy not unto us right things; prophecy unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits^o.” But to what purpose would it be to comply with their wishes? In what could such ministrations end? “If the blind lead the blind, must they not both fall into the ditch?” On the contrary, if we “do” the whole revealed will of God, as far as we are enabled, “and teach” it faithfully unto others, we have reason to hope that we shall have many to be “our joy and crown
of

¹ Matt. xviii. 8, 9. ^m Rom. viii. 7. ⁿ Ps. xl. 8. ^o Isai. xxx. 10.

of rejoicing" in the last day. Instead of complaining, then, that your Minister is too strict either in his life or preaching, be thankful that you have a Minister, who desires to live for no other purpose than "to save himself and them that hear him."]

3. A pure conscience—

["Who can understand his errors?" says David; "O cleanse thou me from my secret faults." Truly it is no easy thing to be a Christian. Let us examine carefully whether there be not some secret unsubdued lust within us, some worm at the root of our gourd. If there be, woe unto us; "Except we repent, we shall surely perish." If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things: but if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." "Then shall we not be ashamed when we have respect unto all his commandments?"]

p 1 John iii. 20, 21.

q Ps. cxix. 6.

DCLXXIV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

Matt. v. 25, 26. *Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison: verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

IT is thought by many, that prudential considerations are unworthy the attention of a Christian. That he ought to be influenced by higher principles, we readily admit. The love of Christ should be to him in the place of all other incentives, so far at least, that he should not need any other motive for doing the will of God. But Christians are men, and feel the force of every principle which can operate upon the human mind: and therefore subordinate motives may fitly be proposed to them in aid of those which are more worthy of their regard. Our
blessed

blessed Lord, having explained the sixth commandment, inculcates the duties contained in it, particularly that of seeking reconciliation with an offended brother: and this he does, first from the consideration of *the offence* which a want of a conciliatory spirit gives to God, and next from a consideration of *the danger* to which it exposes *ourselves*. In the former view we have treated of it in the foregoing verses; in the latter view we are to speak of it at this time. But the peculiarly emphatic manner in which our Lord speaks in the words before us, will naturally, and almost necessarily, lead our thoughts beyond the mere concerns of time, to another tribunal before which we must all appear. We shall therefore consider our text,

I. In its primary and literal sense—

When we have by any means offended a brother, we should not defer the period of making proper concessions, but should make them “quickly:” the danger of delay is great: for,

1. The breach may become irreparable—

[When we have excited a painful feeling in the breast of another, or even injured him in a considerable degree, we may by instantaneous concessions abate at least, if not entirely remove, his anger. But the longer he is suffered to pore over the injuries he has sustained, the more his wound festers, and indignation rankles in his bosom. Continued pondering over the misconduct of the offending person brings to his recollection a multitude of incidents, which under other circumstances would have been overlooked, but, viewed through the medium of anger, are magnified into importance, and regarded as aggravations of the offence committed. Thus an aversion to make acknowledgments on the one side begets inflexibility in the other; and that which might have passed away as a slight and transient dispute, becomes a ground of bitter alienation and rooted aversion. To prevent this, we should strive to make up the matter “while we are in the way with him.” Instead of separating immediately, as is usually the case, and avoiding all means of friendly communication, we should labour to prevent matters from coming to an extremity: and set ourselves in the first instance to
procure

procure a reconciliation, precisely as we would to extinguish a fire that threatened to consume our house: we should not stop till the flames had gained an irresistible ascendant; but should set ourselves first to quench the fire, and afterwards guard against the occasions of future conflagration.]

2. The consequences may be fatal—

[Our Lord supposes a person so irritated as to have determined to prosecute us in a court of law: and he supposes that the offence has been such as, when judgment is given against us, will terminate in our ruin; the compensation awarded him, and the costs of the suit, exceeding our power to discharge, we shall be cast into prison, and be liberated from thence no more.

This is a consequence which not unfrequently happens for want of timely humiliation in the offending party. But where measures are not pursued to such an extent, the disagreement may yet be attended with most calamitous effects. And it will be well for us to remember, that, though the persons we may offend may not be able to avenge themselves in that precise way, there is no person who may not at some time or other have it in his power to do us an essential injury: and therefore, though it is but a poor motive for a Christian to act upon, we may not improperly bear it in mind, as a subordinate consideration, to keep us from giving offence to any, and to stir us up to adopt the most prompt and effectual means of reconciliation with any whom we may have chanced to provoke.]

That our subject may be more generally interesting, we shall consider the text,

II. In a secondary and accommodated sense—

Notwithstanding the Apostles occasionally quote the Scriptures in a secondary and accommodated sense, we would be very cautious in taking such a liberty with the word of God. But we can scarcely conceive that our Lord had not some reference to the future judgment, when the Supreme Judge of all will execute on every unhumiliated sinner the punishment he deserves. Though our offences be primarily against our fellow-creature, HE will take cognizance of them at the last day, if we have not sought forgiveness in this life,

life, as well at the hand of our offended brother, as at his hands. But, since we cannot absolutely affirm that this *is* the sense of our text, we are contented to call it an *accommodated* sense; more especially because, in this latter sense, we consider *God* as the offended party, no less than the Judge who takes cognizance of the offence. Let not this, however, be thought a great liberty, because *HE* is really the offended party, whether our transgression be immediately against man or not; and, as we have observed, he will bring *every* work into judgment, whomsoever it might affect in the first instance.

With this apology, we shall consider our text as prescribing a rule of conduct for us towards God no less than towards our fellow-creatures: and this we may well do; for,

1. Our duty is the same—

[We have all offended God, and *that* in instances without number. To humble ourselves before him is our bounden duty. This would be our duty, though no means of reconciliation had been provided for us: but when God has sent his only-begotten Son to make an atonement for our sins, that so we might be brought into a state of reconciliation with him in a way consistent with the honour of his law and of his moral government, we should be inexcusable indeed if we should delay to seek him one single moment. The ingratitude which such conduct would argue, would aggravate our past offences beyond measure— — —]

2. The reasons for it are the same—

["We are yet in the way with him." Though we are hastening to the judgment-seat of Christ, we are not yet arrived there: and there is yet time for reconciliation with our offended God— — — This time however will be very short; how short we know not: we are advancing towards his tribunal every day and hour— — — But, if once the matter is brought before the Judge, all hope of mercy and forgiveness will be past: justice must then be dispensed according to the strict letter of the law— — — The sentence that will then be decreed will be unalterably fixed for ever: so far from "paying the last farthing" of our debt, we shall never be able to pay one farthing: and consequently must endure the penalty of our sins for ever and

and ever. Who can reflect on the awfulness of that prison, and yet continue one hour in an unreconciled state?—— Consider the solemnity with which our Lord warns us against delay, and lose not another moment in imploring mercy at the hands of God.]

REFLECTIONS—

1. Of what value in the sight of God is brotherly love!

[If we were to judge by the little regard shewn to it by men, we should account it of no value: but God declares, that whatever we may *have*, or *do*, or *suffer*, if destitute of this, we are no better than sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals^a. As far as we are possessed of, this, so far we resemble him^b: as far as we are destitute of it, we resemble “the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning^c.” Let us cultivate to the uttermost this heavenly grace——]

2. How happy would the world be if Christianity universally prevailed!

[“Love is the fulfilling both of the law” and the Gospel too. If the Gospel reigned in the hearts of all, “Judah would no more vex Ephraim, nor would Ephraim envy Judah.” All would be harmony and peace throughout the world. To prove the blessedness of such a state, I need only appeal to those, who have felt at any time the disquietudes arising from anger and contention, and have at last been enabled to re-unite with their brother in cordial amity and affection. What a difference is there in your feelings! Instead of being harassed with incessant vexation, how are you now filled with tranquillity and joy! If then we have nothing more than our own happiness in view, we should, “as much as lieth in us, live peaceably with all men”——]

3. How earnest should we be in preparing for the future judgment!

[There, not overt actions only, but tempers and dispositions, will be strictly investigated; and a sentence will be passed upon us, founded on the moral state of our *minds*. Let us not trifle in a matter of such importance. Let us not be satisfied with saying, “I forgive all;” but let us inquire, whether there be any person of whom we have not asked forgiveness?—— Our proud hearts are very averse to stoop; but if we do not humble ourselves now before God

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^b 1 John iv. 7, 8, 16.

^c 1 John iii. 14, 15. with John viii. 44.

God and man, the time will come when we shall "find no place of repentance, though we should seek it carefully with tears^d."]

^d Heb. xii. 17. Matt. xxv. 10—12.

DCLXXV.

OUR LORD'S EXPOSITION OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

Matt. v. 27, 28. *Ye have heard that it was said by [to] them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

THAT the Jews were unacquainted with the spiritual nature of their law, we do not wonder; because their authorized instructors were chiefly occupied in ceremonial observances; but that Christians should be ignorant of it, is astonishing, since the strongest light has been cast upon it in the New Testament, and every Minister of Christ must make it known, in order to state with accuracy the scope and excellence of the Gospel. Yet it is certain that few Christians comparatively have just views of the law: and it is to be feared, that, in many instances, Ministers themselves are not sufficiently aware of the importance of setting it before their people in all its spirituality and extent. The exposition of it which our Lord has given us in this sermon, precludes all possibility of doubt respecting its real import. In the words which we have now read, he interprets the seventh commandment: in discoursing upon which, it will be proper to consider,

I. Its true import—

The Scribes and Pharisees imagined that the prohibition reached no further than to the actual commission of adultery; but our Lord shews that it extended,

1. To

1. To mental as well as bodily impurity—

[The intent of God's law is, to regulate our hearts. It can never be supposed that God should require us to "cleanse the outside of the cup and platter," and leave us at liberty to retain all manner of uncleanness within. He surely will not be satisfied with seeing us like "whited sepulchres." He forbids an evil desire no less than an evil act^a: and especially in relation to the evil we are considering, he specifies every variety of it as alike hateful in his eyes: "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness," are all distinctly mentioned as "works of the flesh," which equally exclude us from the kingdom of God^b. Of course, the law does not condemn that attachment which is cherished in order to an honourable marriage; but all desires which have not respect to that, it does condemn.

We forbear to enlarge upon the subject, wishing rather to commend it to your consciences before God; but we intreat you all attentively to consider what have been the workings of your own hearts on different occasions, when perhaps you little thought what construction God put upon them, and in what light you were viewed by him^c.]

2. To the means and occasions of impurity, as well as to impurity itself—

[It is needless to observe, that the eye and the ear are inlets to evil, and that they need to be subjected to continual restraints. Our blessed Lord declares, that even a look, when employed for the purpose of exciting an impure desire, or when productive of that effect, involves the soul in guilt, no less than adultery itself. And St. Peter speaks of persons having "eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin." If the eye then may bring so much defilement on the soul, what shall we say of frequenting those places of public amusement, where every thing that is seen and heard has a direct tendency to corrupt the mind? What shall we say of suffering our minds to be contaminated with light and frothy novels, with indecent pictures, with licentious conversation, or indeed with sensual thoughts? Can any one who allows himself in such liberties as these, acquit himself of the charge which is brought against him in the text? Nor are they less criminal, whose dress is framed for this unhallowed end, and who sacrifice both decency and health to the detested purpose of inflaming the appetites of men. It is obvious, that, whether we are the tempters, or the tempted, we are highly criminal: however
the

^a Rom. vii. 7.^b Gal. v. 19, 21.^c On such a subject as this, the utmost possible delicacy must be observed.

the imagination becomes defiled, that defilement constitutes us guilty in the sight of God.]

Such being the view which our Lord himself gives us of the commandment; we proceed to consider,

II. The effect which our Lord's exposition of it should produce upon us—

Were the commandment restricted to its literal meaning, we might find cause perhaps for self-complacency in relation to it. But when it is rightly interpreted, it affords to all of us abundant occasion for,

1. Humiliation—

["Who will say, My heart is clean, I am pure from this sin?" Who, if an adulteress were now to be stoned to death, would take up the first stone to cast at her? who must not retire self-convicted, and self-condemned? If then we would know what ought to be our feelings before God, we have here an image whereby they may be illustrated in the clearest manner. Conceive a woman who has for many years maintained an honourable character, betrayed at last into a forgetfulness of her marriage vows, and exposed to all the shame which her misconduct has justly brought upon her: how degraded would she be in her own eyes! how ashamed would she be to appear in the presence of her injured husband! how would she even lothe her own existence, and hate the light which would expose her to public view! Such consciousness should we feel in the presence of our God, even when our conduct has been most blameless in the sight of men. We should take to ourselves our proper character; and, knowing what abominations the omniscient God has seen within us, we should humble ourselves before him, and lothe ourselves in dust and ashes. We should put our hands on our mouths, and "our mouths in the dust," "crying, Unclean, Unclean."]

2. Gratitude—

[Many instances there are of persons, who in former times have been as moral in their habits as any of us, who yet, through the violence of temptation, have fallen, and brought indelible disgrace upon their names and families. Whence is it, we would ask, that this has not been *our* lot? Is it that *we* have never found any disposition to commit the evils which have ruined *them*? Is it that we are not actually chargeable with those very evils in the sight of God,

God, who identifies the desire with the act itself? Or rather, is it not owing to the kind providence of God, who has screened us from temptation, or interposed in some way to break its force and rescue us from its power? We may perhaps be ready to ascribe our safety to a good education, and other secondary causes: but, if the First Great Cause had not rendered them effectual, they would have been as unavailing for us, as they have been for thousands all around us. Doubtless we have reason to be thankful for the restraints of education, for a dread of public shame, yea even for the laws of the land also: all of these have had their weight, when perhaps other barriers might have been broken down: we have reason therefore to be thankful for them. But especially have we cause to bless our God for the checks of conscience, if at any time the progress of evil has been impeded by them. Whatever have been the means of preserving us from the actual commission of iniquity, the true source of our deliverance is the same; it must ultimately be traced to the providence or grace of God; and all the glory must be given to our heavenly Benefactor.]

3. Circumspection—

[When we consider how many temptations to evil present themselves to us on every side, and what depraved appetites lurk within us, we shall see reason to maintain continual vigilance and circumspection. It was wise in Job, who “made a covenant with his eyes, that he would not even look upon a maid^d.” And Solomon has wisely cautioned us to let our eyes look strait forward^e. If we regarded only the danger of falling into open sin, this advice would be good: but when we reflect on our Lord’s assertion, that an impure look will be considered by Almighty God as actual adultery, we had need to be on our guard against the very first assaults of evil: we should “watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation:” we should “keep,” not our feet only, but “²our hearts also, with all diligence; knowing that out of them are the issues of life.” Remember then what we have already spoken respecting the *means and occasions* of impurity. Guard against the *books*, the *places*, the *company*, the *conversation*, that you have at any time perceived to be defiling to your souls. Be as careful of catching infection from those around you, as you would be if they were disordered with the plague. Go not into the world, without carrying with you, as an antidote, the fear of God. Come not from your intercourse with the world,

without

^d Job xxxi. 1.

^e Prov. iv. 25.

without washing away your defilements in "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." Be on your guard also against your *secret thoughts*; remembering, that God is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of your hearts," and that "he will bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil." It is awful to reflect, what evils will be disclosed in the last day, and what fearful judgments will be denounced on many, who in this world were reputed chaste. May God enable us all to walk as in his immediate presence; and give us such a measure of his grace, as shall "sanctify us wholly," and "preserve us blameless unto his heavenly kingdom!"

DCLXXVI.

THE NECESSITY OF MORTIFYING EVERY SIN.

Matt. v. 29, 30. *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

MANY of the precepts of our holy religion are so strict, that persons indisposed to obey them are ready to turn away from them in despair, exclaiming, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" But must we on that account keep back the truth, or lower the commands of God to the habits and inclinations of men? Must we not rather "declare the whole counsel of God," and enforce to the uttermost the authority of his word? Our blessed Lord has set us an example in this respect; an example which all his servants must follow. He had declared, that an impure look was, in God's estimation, constructive adultery. To this it might be objected, that our constitution, rather than our will, was chargeable with this offence. But our Lord shuts out at once all objections of this kind, by saying, that even a right eye or a right hand must be parted with, rather than that we should suffer them to lead us to the commission of any sin;

sin; and that, if we refuse to sacrifice any thing for his sake, eternal misery will be our merited and inevitable portion.

In his words there are two things to be noticed:

I. The alternative proposed—

It is here supposed, that we have, both within us and without, many things which may operate as incitements to sin. And experience proves that this is really the case: there is not a faculty of our minds, or a member of our bodies, which may not become an occasion of evil; nor is there any thing around us which may not administer fuel to the flames of corruption that are within us. Beauty has a tendency to create unhallowed desires; splendor, to call forth envy and ambition; and plenty, to promote intemperance.

But our Lord sets before us an alternative, either to turn away from those things which are occasions of evil, or to suffer the displeasure of an angry God in hell.

Now this is,

1. An only alternative—

[Nothing less will suffice on our part; nor will any diminution of punishment be admitted on God's part. It is to no purpose to urge, that the evil disposition which we harbour is but small, or that it is in a manner necessary to our happiness: if it is as dear as a right eye, or as necessary as a right hand, it must be sacrificed. Nor is there any intermediate state, like that of purgatory, to which small offenders can be consigned. As there is no medium between the renunciation of sin and the allowance of it, so there is no middle state between heaven and hell. The alternative is clear, definite, irreversible^a. You cannot be "Christ's, unless you crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts^b."

It is worthy of observation, that our Lord does not *affirm* that the retaining of a right hand or eye will insure eternal punishment; but he *takes it for granted*; he considers it as an acknowledged truth: yea, even before the resurrection of the body had been fully revealed, he considers *that* also as acknowledged; he takes for granted that the body, as well as the soul, shall be a subject of happiness or misery

in

^a Rom. viii. 13.

^b Gal. v. 24.

in the eternal world; and he assumes this truth as the ground of his argument. There can be no doubt therefore but that "the whole body will be cast into hell," if any one member of it be made an instrument or occasion of sin.]

2. A desirable alternative—

[It may seem strange to represent such an alternative as desirable: but it is really so: for a permission to harbour one unmortified lust would be like a permission to drink so much poison, or to retain one disorder preying upon our vitals. But this is not all. Sin, if allowed any part in our affections, will strive for mastery, and never cease, till it has attained an undisputed dominion. It is a leprosy which will overspread the whole man; "a canker which will eat," till it has consumed us utterly. Is it not desirable then to have it altogether eradicated, and to be compelled to wage incessant war against it? Were there any other alternative allowed us, we should want a sufficient stimulus to exertion: we should be apt to side with the traitor, and, for the sake of present ease or gratification, to neglect our true interests. But, when there is no other choice given us, but either to mortify every sinful propensity, or to suffer eternal misery in hell, we are constrained to gird ourselves to the battle, and to "fight without intermission the good fight of faith."]

3. A necessary alternative—

[This alternative is no arbitrary imposition to which we are subjected without necessity: it arises out of the very nature of things. God himself could not alter it consistently with his own perfections: he could no more give license to his creatures to harbour sin, or decline punishing it if harboured, than he could cease to be holy, or to have a due respect for the honour of his law. But supposing he were to cancel this alternative, and to admit to the regions of bliss a person who retained one bosom lust, it would be of no avail; for heaven to such a person would not be heaven. Place a man here at a royal banquet; set before him every thing that can please the appetite; let him hear the sweetest melody that ever charmed the ear; let all around him be as full of happiness as their hearts can hold; what enjoyment of it would he have, whilst "a thorn was in his eye?" We do not hesitate to say, that darkness and solitude would to him be far preferable to all this gaiety and splendor. And precisely thus would it be to one who should be admitted into heaven, whilst one unmortified sin was yet rankling in his bosom.]

What

What to do under such circumstances, we learn from,

II. The advice given —

The advice is simply this, To mortify sin without reserve—

[It is here allowed, that the mortification of sin is a difficult and painful work, like the destruction of an eye, or the excision of a hand. But still it must be done. Of course, the language of our text is not to be taken literally: the maiming of the body, though it might incapacitate that individual member for the commission of sin, would effect nothing towards the eradicating of sin from the heart. We must understand the text as referring to the dispositions of the mind, and to the things which call forth those dispositions into exercise. Do *our connexions* draw us aside from the path of duty? Are we beguiled by their example, or intimidated by their authority? We must learn to withstand their influence, and to submit either to their hatred or contempt, rather than be betrayed by them into any thing that is displeasing to God. Doubtless, we should do every thing in our power to conciliate them; but if nothing but a dereliction of duty will satisfy them, we must be prepared with meekness to reply, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." Do *our interests* betray us into sin? Are we engaged in a trade which we cannot carry on without doing things which our consciences condemn? Or have we prospects in life which must be sacrificed, if we will follow the Lord fully? There must be no hesitation on this point: we must pluck out the right eye, and cut off the right hand, and "*cast them from us*" with abhorrence, rather than suffer them to warp our judgment, and defile our conscience.

Are *our passions* the occasions of sin? We must learn to subdue them by fasting and prayer, and to restrain the gratification of them to the limits which God himself has assigned. We must "mortify our members upon earth," and "crucify the whole body of sin^c."

Let it not be said, We require too much. It is not man, but God, that requires these things: and he has promised that "his grace shall be sufficient for us;" so that, however the work may exceed all human power, we need not be discouraged: we are authorized, every one of us, to say with the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Only "walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh^d."]]

The

^c Col. iii. 5. Rom. vi. 6.

^d Gal. v. 16.

The argument with which this advice is enforced, is such as no human Being can withstand—

[We have before observed, that our Lord assumes this as an acknowledged and indisputable truth, namely, that eternal misery in hell must be the consequence of indulging one single sin. From hence he argues, that “it is expedient” to part with sin, rather than incur that tremendous punishment. *The pleasure of sin will surely be too dearly purchased at such a price as this.* Whatever we design to procure, we always consider what its value is: no man would give a large estate for a worthless insignificant bauble: nor would any man gratify his palate with a poisonous draught, which he knew would fill him with excruciating agony to the latest hour of his life. We grant then that sin is pleasant, just for the moment: but will that momentary enjoyment repay an eternity of misery, of such misery too as no imagination can conceive? We grant too that something may be gained by sin: but can the gain ever equal the loss that will be sustained? “If a man should gain the whole world, what would it profit him, if by that means he lost his own soul?”

Moreover, *the pain of mortifying sin can never be compared with that which will follow from the indulgence of it.* Be it so, the mortifying of sin is painful; but what are the sufferings of hell fire? Were the pain of self-denial a million times greater than it is, it is but for a moment; whereas the pains of hell are everlasting. Alas! who can think of *them*, and not tremble? Who can think of *them*, and hesitate one moment about the mortifying of sin? See what we do when informed that the retaining of a limb will endanger our lives: we suffer amputation, however painful it may be; and are glad to pay the person that will perform the operation for us. O let us be equally wise in relation to our souls!

From the contemplation of this argument then we most heartily concur in our Lord’s advice: If your *connexions* ensnare you, renounce them; if your *interests*, sacrifice them; if your *passions*, get them subdued and mortified. Having your choice given you, learn, with Mary, to “choose the better part.”]

We cannot CONCLUDE the subject without pointing out to you the importance,

1. Of Ministerial faithfulness—

[It can be no pleasure to us to speak of “hell fire,” and to alarm you with denouncing it as the portion of so great a multitude of our fellow-creatures. But what are we

to do? What did our Lord himself do in the words before us? If we are silent, we cannot alter God's determinations: whether we tell you of it or not, this is the alternative which God has given you: we cannot reverse it; we cannot soften it; we cannot lower it to your wishes or attainments. We may deceive and ruin you by our silence; but we cannot benefit you at all: we shall only involve ourselves in your ruin. If indeed we have put a wrong construction on our text, then we are blameable for alarming you without reason: but yet, as long as we believe this to be the mind and will of God, we must declare it: "knowing, as we do, the terrors of the Lord, we must persuade men;" and you may at least derive this advantage from our warnings, namely, to be stirred up to a diligent inquiry after truth. But suppose our interpretation of the passage to be just, of what infinite importance to you is it to be rightly informed respecting it! How many of you may now escape the miseries of hell, who, but for this warning, might have been subjected to them for ever! Surely then, Brethren, you are indebted to us for our fidelity. You cannot but know that such faithfulness is the parent of contempt and obloquy. But we would gladly endure infinitely more than ever we have endured, if only you would take heed to our words, and flee from the wrath to come. To all of you then we say, Be thankful for the Ministry that probes you to the quick, and that consults your benefit rather than your approbation.]

2. Of personal integrity—

[Self-love inclines us always to view ourselves more favourably than we ought. If we are conscious of some secret evil, we excuse ourselves as much as possible, in order to dissipate all fear of future punishment. If we hear *that* evil exposed, we are rather led to contemplate it in others, than to view it in ourselves: or if constrained to advert to our own case, we condemn the Minister, either as personal, or as too severe. But what folly is this! If we had reason to apprehend that we had caught the plague, should we not be anxious to ascertain the truth, in order that we might counteract the infection, and escape its baneful effects? Why then are we not equally solicitous to know the state of our souls before God? Why will we shut our eyes against the light? What harm can arise from knowing what God has said concerning us? O put not from you, Brethren, the word of life! Rather come hither, in order that you may be probed; in order that there may be no evil in you undiscovered. Examine yourselves with all imaginable care. Be afraid of nothing so much as being
left

left in ignorance, and deceiving your own souls. When we speak the severest truths, apply them, not to others, but yourselves: take them as a light wherewith to search your own hearts: and beg of God to aid you by his Holy Spirit. Let David's prayer be ever on your lips: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be *any* wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting."]

DCLXXVII.

DIVORCES FORBIDDEN.

Matt. v. 31, 32. *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery.*

THE laws of men cannot always proceed to the extent that might be wished in the support of truth and virtue. They must sometimes bend to circumstances, and tolerate evils which they cannot totally prevent. Even under the Theocracy itself this necessity was felt and admitted. The laws of Moses, as far as they were purely *moral*, were perfect and inflexible; but, as far as they were *political*, they yielded in a measure to the state and character of the people for whom they were made. The Jews were a hard-hearted and stiff-necked people, and extremely licentious in their manners. They would multiply their wives to any extent that they chose, and put them away on the most frivolous occasions. Moses knew that an absolute prohibition of such practices would only render the men more ferocious, and the women more miserable: and therefore he contented himself with laying some restrictions on the men, that if divorces could not be prevented, they might at least be rendered less frequent, by being made more solemn, more deliberate, more manifest. He limited the per-

mission

mission to those instances wherein there was in the woman some moral, natural, or acquired defect, which was the ground of her husband's alienation from her. He then ordered that a writing of divorcement should be drawn up, and in the presence of two witnesses be given to her; that so, if she were afterwards married to another man, she might be able to prove that she was not living in adultery, because her former marriage had been annulled^a. This restriction, which was only a *permission* granted on account of the hardness of their hearts, was by the Scribes and Pharisees construed into a *command* to put away their wives, as soon as ever they ceased to love them: and, under cover of this law, the most licentious and cruel practices almost universally obtained. Our blessed Lord, who came to put all his followers under the authority of the *moral* law, and to reduce the world to its primeval sanctity, declared, that this license was contrary to the original institution of marriage; and that henceforth, as Adam and Eve were formed for each other, and united in marriage, without any latitude allowed to either of them to dissolve the connexion, or to admit any other to a participation of their mutual rights, so should every man and woman, when united in wedlock, have an inalienable right in each other, a right that should never be cancelled, but by a violation of the marriage vows^b. To this subject our Lord was led by his exposition of the seventh commandment. He had shewn, that that commandment was no less violated by an impure look than by the act of adultery itself: and now he proceeds to shew, that those practices which were supposed to be sanctioned by the Mosaic law were never to be tolerated amongst his followers, since they were directly contrary to the spirit of that commandment. There was one, and only one reason, which should henceforth be admitted

as

^a Deut. xxiv. 1.^b Matt. xix. 3--9.

as a proper ground of divorce: and if any one in future should put away his wife in defiance of this restriction, he should be dealt with as an adulterer in the day of judgment.

The restriction itself being so clear and simple, we shall not attempt any further elucidation of it, but shall rather point out *the importance of the restriction to the welfare of mankind*.

I. It raises the female sex from the lowest state of degradation—

[Whilst men were at liberty to take, and to repudiate, as many wives as they pleased, the female sex were viewed in no other light than as females are regarded by the brute creation. Their moral and intellectual qualities were overlooked. Whatever distinguished them as an higher order of Beings, was disregarded: their beauty only was deemed of any essential consequence; and they were valued only as means and instruments of licentious gratification. Consider the state of those whom Solomon and Rehoboam selected as ministers to their pleasures. Rehoboam had eighteen wives and sixty concubines^c. Solomon had seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines^d. What can be conceived more humiliating than the state of all those women? all cut off from converse with men; all precluded from a possibility of filling that station in life, to which, in common with other females, they had been ordained. View those also who were selected for the choice of king Ahasuerus. Officers were appointed to gather together all the most beautiful young virgins throughout the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of his empire: these were all to be purified with oil of myrrh and sweet odours for the space of a whole year; and then in succession to be admitted to the king for one night, and never afterwards to see him, unless called for by name^e. Four years had the succession continued, before Esther's turn for admission to him arrived; and she, pleasing him beyond all the rest, was appointed Queen^f. How incredible does all this appear; that such a state of things should ever exist; that the parents should ever suffer it; and that the females should ever endure it! Were it reported in any other history than that which we know to be divine, we should never believe that the whole female sex should ever be reduced to such a state of horrible degradation as this.

But

^c 2 Chron. xi. 21.

^e Esth. ii. 3, 12, 13, 14.

^d 1 Kin. xi. 3.

^f ib. ver. 15—17

But from this the Gospel raises them. By the restriction in our text, they are again elevated to the rank which the first woman sustained in Paradise. Though still inferior to the man in power and dignity^g, they possess equal rights with him. He has no more power to repudiate them, than they him. The wife has now the same property in her husband as he has in her^h: nor can any thing but a wilful alienation of it by infidelity on her part deprive her of it. If in one single instance he transfer to another those regards which by his nuptial vows were exclusively assigned to her, he shall be condemned for it by God, as certainly as she would be, if she were guilty of a similar transgression.]

II. It moderates the tempers and passions of men—

[Every one knows that power is a snare; and that it is difficult to possess unlimited authority without being sometimes led to exercise it in an unbecoming manner. Suppose a man at liberty to put away his wife whenever he chose, and to take whomsoever he would to fill her place; is it not probable that he would presume upon that power to tyrannize over her and oppress her? Is it not to be expected also that he would be easily captivated by youth and beauty, as soon as ever sickness or age should have robbed his wife of her former attractions? Under such circumstances, little could be hoped for, but inconstancy in affection, irritability in temper, licentiousness in manners, and cruelty in conduct. But by the restriction in our text all occasion for these things is cut off; and a necessity is imposed of cultivating dispositions directly opposite. A man when first he plights his troth to a virgin, knows that he takes her for better and for worse. He is aware that the knot can never be untied; and that his connexion with her forbids even a desire after any other. Hence then he sees the necessity of patience and forbearance towards her: he feels the importance of gaining her affections by kind usage: and he determines, by contributing to her happiness as much as possible, to insure his own. If any man think that the restriction operates unfavourably on him, let him compare the tumultuous passions of a lawless libertine with the chaste enjoyments of conjugal fidelity: and he will soon see the one is “like the crackling of thorns under a pot,” whilst the other is a source of steady and increasing comfort to the latest hour of his life.]

III. It

^g 1 Cor. xi. 3, 7—10.

^h 1 Cor. vii. 2—4.

III. It provides for the happiness of the rising generation—

[What must be the effect of that licentious intercourse of which we have spoken? Would men feel much regard for children whose mothers they had ignominiously dismissed? Would even the mothers themselves feel that regard for their children, which they would have done, if they had still retained the affections of their cruel father? The women, reduced to great extremities, would doubtless in many instances leave their children to perish with cold and hunger, if not put a period to their existence with their own hands.

But how different the condition of children under the present system! Now both the parents become their guardians, and equally exert themselves to make provision for them. They look upon their children as their dearest treasure; and expect from them their richest comforts. Hence they feel interested in imbuing their minds with Christian knowledge, and in regulating their conduct according to the Christian code. In short, their happiness being bound up in their offspring, they, for their own comfort's sake, instruct them in whatever is necessary to make them good members of society at least, if not also members of the Church above. We say not indeed that this effect is universally produced: but we do say, that the restriction in our text, if duly considered, has a direct tendency to produce it.]

From this view of our subject we may see,

1. How great are our obligations to Christianity—

[God, even under the law, bore strong testimony against the licentious cruelty of his peopleⁱ: but our Saviour has decided the point for ever. None can henceforth inflict, or suffer, such injuries as the Jews inflicted on their wives. Even those who have no regard whatever for religion, are partakers of these benefits, in common with the whole Church. Christianity has raised the tone of morals, and made those things infamous, which are approved and applauded where the light of the Gospel is not known—— But if the ungodly and unbelieving are thus benefited by, the Gospel, how much more are they who feel its influence on all their conduct and conversation! They, knowing that the marriage union is indissoluble, set themselves to fulfil its duties; and in fulfilling them, are made truly happy. Behold a Christian family conducting themselves after this manner,

ⁱ Mal. ii. 13—16.

manner, and then you will see what Christianity has done for an ungodly world.]

2. How studious we should be to adorn its doctrines—

[In nothing is Christianity more seen than in the deportment of its votaries in relative and social life. It is easy for men to be on their guard when they are in company, and to demean themselves reverently in the House of God: but it is not easy for persons to be consistent in all their conduct amidst the various occurrences of domestic life. Here the tempers, if not restrained by grace, will break out: the husband will be imperious and harsh; or the wife will be fretful, querulous, and disobedient. Feeling a confidence that their respective weaknesses will be hid from public view, they shew them to each other without restraint. Beloved Brethren, inquire whether this be not the case with you; and, if it be, learn to mortify these unhallowed tempers. The true way to adorn religion, is to propose to yourselves that image by which the marriage state is represented in the Gospel. It is compared to that union which subsists between the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church. The Church renders unto him all grateful obedience; whilst he exercises towards it the most self-denying and endearing affection. Thus should the wife be cheerfully obedient to her husband, even as to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in every thing which is not contrary to the will of God: and the husband should account it his joy to manifest towards her all possible love, never exercising authority over her but with a view to her best interests and her truest happiness. Only let this be the pattern for your imitation, and you will never wish for a relaxation of that law whereby you are united to each other in an indissoluble bond. You will rather bless God that he has made the bond so strict; and you will avail yourselves of your mutual influence to advance in each other your spiritual and eternal interests, that, “as fellow-heirs of the grace of life,” you may dwell together in heaven for evermore.]

DCLXXVIII.

SWEARING FORBIDDEN.

Matt. v. 33—37. *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto*

unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head; because thou canst not make one hair white or black: but let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.

AMONGST persons unaccustomed to hear the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, a kind of jealousy is often excited by the very recital of the text; especially if the preacher be known to be zealous for those doctrines, and the passage which he has selected evidently inculcates them. This feeling is manifestly wrong; and every one who loves the Gospel sees in a moment the evil of indulging it. But is this feeling peculiar to those who are ignorant of the Gospel? No; by no means: for religious people themselves are too apt to yield to it, when any text is announced which leads only to the discussion of some moral subject. But if this feeling be wrong in the unenlightened part of mankind, it is a thousand times more so in those who profess to be enlightened, and who ought on that very account to love every portion of the Sacred Volume, and gladly to hear every truth insisted on in its season.

The subject of swearing does not seem to promise much edification to an audience conversant with the sublimer mysteries of our religion: but, if our blessed Lord saw fit to speak of it so fully in his sermon on the mount, we may be sure that our time cannot be misspent in investigating, as we propose to do,

I. The nature and extent of the prohibition before us—

You must be aware that there is a very respectable body of people in this kingdom, who not only deny the lawfulness of oaths altogether, but make the abstaining from them an essential part of their religion; insomuch that the Legislature, which exacts an oath of all others, allows them

to

to give their evidence in a way of simple assertion. Now these people understand the prohibition in our text as unlimited: whereas we consider it as limited.

To exhibit it in its true light, I shall shew,

1. To what it does not extend—

[It does not extend then to *oaths taken in a court of judicature*. This is evident from their being absolutely enjoined on many occasions by God himself^a— — — Moreover, our blessed Lord submitted to be examined upon oath; and, on being adjured by the living God, gave a reply, which nothing else could extort from him^b. And by his Disciples also such an use of oaths is manifestly approved: it is said, that an oath for confirmation is an “end of all strife^c.” Now then I ask, Would such kind of oaths have been commanded of God, taken by Christ, and approved by the Apostles, if there had been any thing necessarily and inherently wrong in them? We are well assured, that had they been in themselves morally evil, the use of them would never have been so sanctioned.

Nor does the prohibition absolutely extend to *the use of them on any other solemn occasion*. On some particular occasions they were imposed and taken by holy men of old. Abraham exacted an oath of his servant whom he sent to seek a wife for his son Isaac^d. Jacob took an oath of Joseph, as Joseph also did of the children of Israel, that they would carry up his bones to Canaan, and bury them in the Promised Land^e. And Jonathan made David swear to him to exercise tenderness towards his posterity, after that he should be seated on the throne of Israel^f. Under the New Testament, the most distinguished of all the Apostles very frequently made an appeal to God, when the subject was such as needed a solemn confirmation, and could not be confirmed in any other way^g— — —

Who that considers this statement can doubt for a moment the admissibility of oaths on such occasions as could not otherwise be satisfactorily determined?]

2. To what it does extend—

[The foregoing limitation is intimated even in the text: for though the words, “Swear not at all,” appear to be indefinite, yet it is plain that the prohibition was designed only

^a Exod. xxii. 10, 11. Numb. v. 19—22. Deut. vi. 13.

^b Matt. xxvi. 63, 64. ^c Heb. vi. 16. ^d Gen. xxiv. 2, 3, 9.

^e Gen. xlvii. 29—31. & 1. 25.

^f 1 Sam. xx. 14—17.

^g Rom. i. 9. & ix. 1. 2 Cor. i. 18, 23. & xi. 31. Gal. i. 20. Phil. i. 8.

only to reach to such oaths as were used in common "conversation:" "Swear not, but let your *conversation* be Yea, yea, Nay, nay."

Nevertheless the import of the prohibition is very extensive. It extends, first, to *all irreverent appeals to God*. The "taking of God's holy name in vain" is forbidden in the third commandment; which our blessed Lord is here rescuing from the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees. They thought that nothing but perjury was a violation of that commandment: but he informs them that all light mention of the name of God, and all irreverent appeals to him, were sinful. Well would it be, if they who customarily curse and swear, and they also who occasionally use the words "God knoweth," were sensible of the guilt which they contract!

The prohibition extends also to *all swearing by the creature*. The Jews had a much greater reverence for the name of God than the generality of Christians have. Being averse to mention that, they invented an inferior kind of oaths, and swore "by heaven, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, or by their own heads." To these they annexed less sanctity, and were therefore less scrupulous about the violation of them. But our Lord shews, that to swear by the creature was, in fact, to swear by the Creator himself; since every creature was his, and subsisted only by his providential care. On another occasion he entered more fully still into this argument, and shewed the folly of recurring to such subterfuges^h. In fact, if a separation could be made, there would be to the full as much guilt in swearing by the creature as in swearing by the Creator; since it would be an ascribing of omniscience and omnipotence to that which is incapable of knowing the things about which the appeal is made, or of executing judgment between the parties. This is idolatry; and, as idolatry, will be visited with God's heaviest displeasureⁱ. This statement is abundantly confirmed by the apostle James, who prohibits the same kind of oaths under the pain of eternal condemnation^k.

Once more, the prohibition extends to *all unnecessary confirmation of our word*. All vehement protestations are unbecoming the Christian character. Unless the urgency of the occasion require some additional testimony, a simple affirmation or negation is all that we should use: our "Yea should be yea, and our Nay, nay." If questioned, we may repeat our answer; "Yea, yea," or "Nay, nay;" but beyond that we ought not to go, except the authority of a magistrate,

^h Matt. xxiii. 16—22.

ⁱ Jer. v. 7.

^k Jam. v. 12.

magistrate, or the importance of the subject, absolutely require it.]

Having thus endeavoured to mark the extent of the prohibition, we will proceed to state,

II. The reasons of it—

Our Lord says, “Whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.” The word which is here translated “evil,” may also mean, “the evil one:” and in this sense many understand it. If we take it in the former sense, it relates to the *source* of such expressions; and if in the latter sense, it refers rather to their *tendency*: since Satan instigates men to swear, in order that he may accomplish by that means his own malevolent designs. Both senses being equally good and proper, we shall include both.

Our Lord then prohibits oaths, because they are evil,

1. In their source—

[Whence do they spring? Frequently *from an undue vehemence of temper*. Those who are irascible, almost always are intemperate in their expressions. They will swear, if not by God, yet by their *life*, their *soul*, their *faith*; or they will pledge their honour, which yet is God’s, as much as their “head” is God’s. In short, whether they affirm or deny, they will, directly or indirectly, make God a party in their cause. If reprov’d for this, they will urge their passion as an excuse; but this is to urge one sin as an excuse for another: and, if we grant that hasty expressions originate in hasty tempers, they are on that very account exceeding criminal. They “come of evil,” and are for that very reason to be condemn’d.

But they arise also *from low thoughts of the importance of truth*. A person duly sensible of the sacredness of truth will not hastily convey an idea that his simple assertions are unworthy of credit: he will be cautious what he affirms: and, having affirmed any thing, he will expect his word to be taken as much as his oath. If unreasonable persons require more, he will rather leave the confirmation of his word to other testimony, than admit, by unnecessary oaths or protestations, the existence of an intention to deceive. In direct opposition to such a character is he, who wantonly transgresses the commandment in our text: he proves by that

that very act, that he has no such high sense of honour, no such value for truth, no such disposition to maintain his character for veracity. What then must that habit be, which so degrades every one that yields to it; or rather, I should say, which marks him so destitute of the noblest attributes of man?

We may further add, that all violations of this commandment proceed *from a disregard of God, and of every thing belonging to him.* Who that had a reverence for the Divine Majesty, would dare to profane his name, and to appeal to him on every trivial occasion? People, when they take God's name in vain, account it sufficient to say, "I did not think of it:" but what excuse is that? It says, in fact, "I have no reverence for God: he has forbidden such levity; but I have no fear of offending him: he is present when I profane his name, but I have no wish to please him. Were I in the presence of an earthly monarch, I could take heed to my words, and put a bridle on my tongue; but, though I know that God both sees and hears me, I regard him no more than if he did not exist. It is true, he declares, that, "if I take his name in vain, he will not hold me guiltless;" but "my lips are my own: who is he, that he should be Lord over me?" Let him *say* what he will, or *do* what he will, I am determined to have my own way, and to set him at defiance.

Once more I ask, What must that habit be, which betrays such a disposition as this?]

2. In their tendency—

[Satan, "the god of this world," is ever "working in all the children of disobedience." As he put it into the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira to lie, so he puts it into the hearts of ungodly men to swear. By this he has several objects to accomplish.

By this he hopes, first, *to eradicate truth and virtue from the world.* When he has prevailed on men so to cast off the fear of God as to take his name in vain, he will easily instigate them to any thing else. Having already lowered their estimate of truth, he will soon lead them to overstep the bounds of truth, and occasionally to confirm their falsehoods also with oaths. Indeed he stirs up men to confirm with oaths that which is doubtful, more frequently than that which is true; and consequently to perjure themselves, without being at all aware what guilt they are contracting: and could he influence all, as he does the great mass of those who are under his dominion, there would be no longer any

any truth or virtue to be found. He was a liar from the beginning; and he would take care that all his children should be known by their resemblance to him.^m

By this too he hopes, in the next place, *to bring God himself into contempt*. How ardently he desires to attain this object, we need not say: but this is clear, that the means he uses to attain it are admirably adapted to the end proposed. Tell a person who is accustomed to swear, that God is displeased with him; and you make no more impression on him than if he had never heard of such a Being. Tell him that he shall be fined a few shillings, and he is all alive to the subject: but if you speak of “the judgments of God, he puffs at them” *with perfect contempt*ⁿ. Nor is it in the speaker only that these effects are produced: the hearers of such conversation gradually lose their abhorrence of the sin, and their tender concern for the honour of their God: and the more this insensibility is diffused, the more does Satan exult and triumph.

Lastly, by this Satan aims *to destroy the souls of men*. What destruction he makes in this nation by means of oaths, none but God can tell. This appears to many to be a little sin; and Satan easily seduces men to the commission of it. But, even if it drew no other sins along with it, it would not be small, nor would the consequences of it be unimportant. God has said, that “he will not hold such persons guiltless.” They may hold themselves guiltless, it is true; but God will not form his judgment according to their estimate: he has fixed his determination, and will never reverse it. This Satan knows: and, if he can but deceive us with vain hopes, he has gained his end. Yes, in truth, that roaring lion goeth about, seeking to devour us; and then does he most prosper in his endeavours, when he leads us to “sport ourselves with our own deceivings.”]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are addicted to the habit of swearing—

[I speak not to those who are familiar with oaths and imprecations; (if their own consciences do not speak to them, all that I can say will be to little purpose:) but to those who make only occasional appeals to God, or take his name in vain. View your sin as it has been set forth: view it in its source. What undue warmth of temper does it manifest! what insensibility to the value and importance of truth! and what a profane disregard of God! View it in its tendency: see how it tends to eradicate virtue from

^m John viii. 44.

ⁿ Ps. x. 5.

• 2 Pet. ii. 13.

from the world; to bring God himself into contempt, and to ruin the souls of men. Is this a habit that you will indulge? What do you gain by it? By other sins you obtain some kind of gratification; but by this, none at all: it brings no pleasure, no profit, no honour, along with it. In the commission of other sins you sell your souls for something; in this, for nought: you do not sell, but *give*, yourselves to your great adversary. O that God may impress this thought upon your minds, and that this word may be ever sounding in your ears, "SWEAR NOT AT ALL!"]

2. Those who are free from that habit—

[Shall I tell you what the ungodly world are ready to say to you? "These people will not *swear*; but they will *lie*." Dearly beloved, this would be a dreadful reproach indeed if it were true: and whosoever he be to whom this reproach attaches, that person has reason to tremble for his state before God. Tell me not of faith, or love, or any thing else; for this is certain, that "all liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone^p." Christian Tradesmen, consider this in your dealings with mankind; for "as the nail sticketh between the jointings of the stones, so doth lying between buying and selling^q." Christian Servants, remember this when tempted to conceal a fault, or to exculpate yourselves from some blame. Let all, of every class, and every degree, remember this. If ye be Christ's indeed, ye will remember him "in whose lips there was no guile found." Let truth be in your inward parts, and let it be ever dear to your souls. Set a watch before the door of your lips; for "of every idle word you shall give account in the day of judgment;" yea, "by your words you shall be justified; and by your words you shall be condemned^r."]

^p Rev. xxi. 8.

^q Eccles^{us}. xxvii. 2.

^r Matt. xii. 36, 37.

DCLXXIX.

RETALIATION FORBIDDEN.

Matt. v. 38—41. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also: and if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also: and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*

IF Christianity be worthy of admiration on
account

account of the sublime mysteries it reveals, it is no less so on account of the pure morality it inculcates. Its precepts are as far above the wisdom of fallen man, as its doctrines. Search all the systems of ethics that ever were written, and where shall we find such directions as these? In vain shall we look for them in the productions of Greece and Rome: in vain shall we consult the sages and philosophers of any other nation: such precepts as these are found no where but in the Inspired Volume. *The law of retaliation* has in all nations been deemed equitable and right: but in the Christian code it is expressly forbidden.

In considering the subject of retaliation, we shall notice,

I. The errors which obtain in the world respecting it—

The Pharisees admitted of revenge; and grounded that licence upon the word of God. The passages which they adduced in confirmation of their sentiments were strong; but they did not at all refer to the conduct of individuals towards each other, but of magistrates towards the community at large^a. To apply them to individuals, was a perversion of them, a perversion disgraceful to the teachers of such doctrines, and fatal to those who embraced them.

We, having our Lord's own comment on those passages, cannot any longer justify our errors by an appeal to Holy Writ: but yet our sentiments in relation to the subject treated of in our text, are, for the most part, precisely similar to those which were maintained among the Jews. Two things in particular we will specify, which are universally applauded amongst us, yet are exceedingly contrary to the spirit of Christianity:

1. A rigid maintenance of our rights—

[Doubtless our rights, whether civil or religious, ought to be dear to us: and a certain degree of watchfulness over them may well be admitted; because if our rights, whether

^a Exod. xxi. 22—25. Deut. xix. 16—21. These passages were to direct them in the administration of justice.

whether public or private, be invaded by one person, they may by another; and if they be suffered to be curtailed, they may be altogether annihilated. But this will not justify that extreme jealousy which some express about their rights. There are many who will talk incessantly about the rights of man, who yet will trample without remorse on all the rights of God. They will not suffer the smallest infringement of their own liberty; whilst they themselves are the most oppressive tyrants, wherever their authority extends. These may boast of their firmness in maintaining what they think to be right: but "they know not what spirit they are of." How unlike are they to Paul, who, rather than insist upon the support to which, as a Minister of Christ, he was entitled, would work at his trade by night, after having been occupied in preaching all the day! How unlike to Christ also, who, when, as the Son of God, he might have claimed exemption from paying tribute to the Temple, wrought a miracle to satisfy the demand, rather than put a stumbling-block in the way of any by a refusal! We do not undertake to say, that, in cases of great importance, a person may not expostulate with his oppressor, as Christ did^b; or insist upon his right, as did the apostle Paul^c; but we are perfectly sure that a readiness to demand our utmost right on every occasion, argues a spirit very different from that which is inculcated in the Gospel of Christ.]

2. A keen resentment of wrongs—

[This is thought highly meritorious. A disposition to pass by an insult or an injury would be deemed meanness and cowardice; and the person who indulged it would be banished from society, and held up to universal scorn and contempt. Hence arise wars, duels, and domestic feuds without number. But is such a disposition agreeable to the word of God? Look at the conduct of David, when persecuted by Saul: *he* repeatedly had his adversary within his power, and could easily have killed him; but he would not: he preferred rather the committing of his cause to God; and rendered nothing but good, in return for all the evil that Saul had done unto him: and, to shew that he did not consider such conduct as a superfluous act of generosity, he brands the opposite conduct with the name of *wickedness*: "Thus saith the proverb of the ancients; *Wickedness* proceedeth from the wicked; but *mine* hand shall *not* be upon thee^d." Compare with this the conduct also of the saints in the New Testament: St. James, speaking of them to their proud oppressors, says, "Ye have

^b John xviii. 22, 23.

^c Acts xvi. 37.

^d 1 Sam. xxiv. 10, 13. See also xxvi. 7—12.

have condemn'd and killed the just; and *he doth not resist you*.*"]

That the sentiments of the world on the subject of retaliation are quite erroneous, will appear yet further, by considering,

II. The line of conduct which Christianity requires—

The authoritative command of Jesus in the text, is this: "I say unto you, That ye resist not evil," that is, that ye resist not *the injurious person*^f. This, especially taken in connexion with our Lord's illustration of it, undoubtedly enjoins us to live in the exercise of,

1. A patient spirit—

[We are not to be inflamed with anger against those who treat us ill: but to bear their injuries with meekness and long-suffering. The direction of the Apostle is, "In your patience possess ye your souls:" and again, "Let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." I am aware; that it is difficult to bear injuries, when we know them to be altogether unmerited. But to abstain from every thing vindictive was enjoined under the Old Testament^g: and much more is it insisted on in the New Testament^h. And the more undeserving we are of the injurious treatment, the more are we called upon to display our patience, after the example of our blessed Lord, who instead of rendering evil for evil, silently committed his cause to his righteous God and Fatherⁱ.]

2. A yielding spirit—

[Suppose a person were to carry the insult so far as to strike us a blow upon the face: what ought we to do then? Are we not at liberty to return the blow? No; we may expostulate with the injurious person as our Lord did; "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but, if not, why smitest thou me?" but we must not for a moment think of avenging ourselves^k. It may be said, This would be an encouragement to him to strike us again: we hope not; but if it were, it were better to "turn the other cheek," and be smitten again, than that we should resent the injury; for

* Jam. v. 6.

^f τῷ πονηρῷ.

^g Lev. xix. 18. Prov. xx. 22. & xxiv. 29.

^h Rom. xii. 17, 19. 1 Thess. v. 15.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 20—23.

^k Isai. l. 6. with Lam. iii. 30.

for the blows only hurt our body; but the resentment would wound our soul.

Again, suppose any one were to injure us in our *property*, as well as our *person*, and, under colour of law, were to “take away our coat:” what shall we do? Shall we indulge a litigious spirit, in order to get it back again? No; rather let him “take our cloak also,” than induce us to gratify an angry or vindictive spirit¹.

Once more;—Suppose any one, under pretence of some public emergency, were to infringe upon our *liberty*, and to compel us (as the Jews did Simon the Cyrenian, when they “compelled him to bear” our Saviour’s cross,) to carry a burthen for them “a mile:” what *then*? Must we submit? Whether in *all* cases; or not, I do not pretend to say: but this is clear; that it is better to “go with him *two*” miles, than to vex ourselves, and quarrel about it. The man ~~that~~ yields, is always safe; he knows the extent of the injury which he receives: but he who once begins to contend, knows not where he shall stop, nor what injury he may suffer in his own soul, before the contention shall cease.]

3. A forgiving spirit—

[Forbearance and forgiveness are frequently united in the holy Scriptures; nor should they ever be separated in our conduct^m. Nor would the exercise of forgiveness be so difficult, if only we considered how much greater injury people do to themselves, than they can possibly do to us. Do what they will, they can never injure us, except in mere external things: our souls are beyond their reach: but, whilst they endeavour to injure *us*, they do the most irreparable injury to their own souls. Let us suppose for a moment, that a person, robbing us of a little worthless fruit, were to fall down, and break every bone of his body; would not our pity for his misfortune swallow up all resentment for his fault? So then it should be with us towards all who injure us: there is no comparison at all between the injury they do to us and to themselves; and therefore we should be ready to exercise forgiveness towards them, and to implore forgiveness for them at God’s hands.]

LEARN then, from this subject,

1. How rare a thing real Christianity is—

[*This* is Christianity: all, without this, is an empty sound. Look then through the world, and see how little there is of it any where to be found: yea, let the saints themselves see how little of true Christianity they possess.

This

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 7.

^m Col. iii. 12, 13. Eph. iv. 31, 32.

This view of Christian duty may well fill every one of us with shame and confusion of face.]

2. How necessary a renewed spirit is, either to a right discernment of religion, or to the practice of it—

[The *precepts* of religion are no less foolishness to the natural man, than the *doctrines*. What Heathen ever inculcated such lessons? or what unconverted Christian ever thoroughly approved them in his heart. People fancy that they have power to *do* the will of God: but can they *do these things*? As well may they attempt to turn the course of the sun, as so to turn the current of corrupt nature. We must have an understanding given us that we may know these things; and strength that we may do them^o.]

3. How ornamental true religion is to every one that possesses it—

[Who can see a person acting up to the spirit of these precepts, and not admire him? Who can help admiring this spirit in Christ and in his holy Apostles? Surely, such are “*beautified with salvation*,” and God himself must admire them^p.]

4. How happy the world would be, if vital Christianity universally prevailed—

[There would then be no scope for the exercise of these difficult graces, since no injuries would be committed upon earth — — — O that God would hasten that blessed time!]

1 Cor. ii. 12.

2 Cor. iii. 5.

p 1 Pet. iii. 4.

DCLXXX.

LIBERALITY ENJOINED.

Matt. v. 42. *Give to him that asketh thee; and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not away.*

TO render good for evil is a duty of indispensable obligation; and many Commentators consider it as particularly enjoined in the words which we have just read. If we take the passage as connected with the directions which immediately precede it, its meaning will be, that we must not be contented with a patient submission

mission to injuries, but must actively exert ourselves to render to our enemies any service which they may require. But, as this is plainly enjoined in the verses following our text, we rather understand the text as expressing in general terms the duty of liberality, without confining it to any particular description of persons: and in that light we propose now to insist upon it.

We shall inquire,

I. What is that spirit which is inculcated—

Were we to adhere strictly to the *literal* meaning of the words, they would apply only to those whose circumstances in life empowered them to *give* and *lend* to their more necessitous Brethren. Moreover, they might, *as to the letter*, be obeyed by a person of opulence, whilst he was far from yielding to God any acceptable obedience. We must therefore inquire, what that *spirit* is which they inculcate? They enjoin,

1. A spirit of compassion—

[It is to be supposed that those who make applications to us for a gift or loan, are themselves in necessitous and distressed circumstances. And towards all such persons we should exercise unfeigned pity and compassion. We should consider them, not merely as children of the same heavenly Parent, but as members of our own body; and should have the same sympathy with them and desire to relieve them, as any one member of our body would feel towards any other that had sustained an injury. We should “look, not on our own things only, but every one also on the things of others;” “bearing their burthens,” and being as ready to participate their sorrows as their joys. The language of our hearts should ever be in unison with that of Job, “Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor?” This is a spirit which all must have, whatever be their situation and circumstances in life: and if we can “behold our brother in need, and shut up our bowels of compassion from him,” it may well be asked, “How dwelleth the love of God in us^b?”]

2. A spirit of benevolence—

[This is a disposition of a higher kind. There is a natural

^a Job xxx. 25.

^b 1 John iii. 17.

natural tenderness in many, and a susceptibility of impression from tales of woe, at the same time that they are not active in searching out opportunities of exercising their benevolent affections. But our feelings towards mankind should resemble those of a tender mother, who needs not to have her sensibilities called forth by any distressing accident: she loves her child, and delights in administering to its wants: her regards are spontaneously exercised towards it; and, if she see any occasion for more than ordinary attention, she finds her own happiness in contributing to the happiness of her child. Thus, if we saw one to whom a gift or loan was necessary, we should be ready, at the very first intimation of the case, to stretch forth towards him the hand of charity, conceiving ourselves more blessed in an opportunity of imparting good, than he can be in receiving it at our hands. In a word, we should tread in the steps of our adorable Lord, who "went about doing good;" and, like the sun in its course, should exist only for the benefit of others, and diffuse happiness wheresoever we come.]

3. A spirit of generosity—

[Particular occasions must be met with a zeal proportioned to them. It may be, that some urgent necessity has arisen, and that a great effort is requisite to sustain an afflicted brother. Or, it may be a season of general distress, when the multitude of those who need our assistance calls for more than ordinary exertions to relieve them. We have an instance of this in the primitive Church. The Jews were so inveterate against their Brethren who embraced Christianity, that they would, if possible, have deprived them of all means of subsistence: but the richer converts, who had lands or houses, sold them, and put all their money into one common stock; thus reducing themselves to a level with the lowest, that all might be supplied with "food convenient for them."^c

Another instance we have, in the Churches of Macedonia, who, "in a trial of great affliction, and in the midst of deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of liberality;" exerting themselves, "not only according to their ability, but beyond it," to supply their distressed Brethren in Judea^d.

Thus should it be with us, when any great and extraordinary difficulty has arisen: our spirit should rise to the occasion: and, if we cannot emulate that glorious example, we should at least be ready to comply with the exhortation of the Baptist, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to

^c Acts iv. 32—35.

^d 2 Cor. viii. 1—4.

to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise^e."]

Doubtless this disposition is amiable: but how shall we determine,

II. To what extent it should be exercised—

With respect to *the disposition itself*, we do not hesitate to say, that it admits of no limit whatever—

[There is *not a person* in the universe who is not called to exercise it. The mechanic, or the labourer, should exert himself, according to his ability, to relieve others; he should "labour, working with his hands, not to support himself merely, but that he may have to give to him that needeth^f." Even the widow that has but two mites, may yet exceed in her liberality all her opulent neighbours^g. The very person that receives relief, may yet pant for an opportunity to afford it to others: and, in that case, God, who sees his heart, will accept the will for the deed: "for, if there be first a willing mind, it shall be accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not^h." Nor is there any assignable limit to *the degree* in which the disposition should be exercised. The only limit that can be mentioned (if it may be called a *limit*), is, to be "merciful, even as our Father which is in heaven is mercifulⁱ."]

But the precise *manner* in which it should be exercised must be regulated by circumstances. It must vary according to,

1. Our own means and abilities—

[All persons have it not in their power to do good to the same extent: nor can all who have the same income, devote the same proportion of it to the poor: for a man who has a family, cannot possibly have so much to spare as he who has none but himself to maintain: nor can it be reasonably expected, that one, who, from his rank in society, has a certain degree of dignity to support, can afford as much as another, who, with the same income, has no such necessity imposed upon him. Besides, persons may be very differently circumstanced. One may be able to afford a *loan*, when he is not able, with propriety, to *give*: and another may be able to *give* a smaller sum, when he

^e Luke iii. 11. If the occasion of the sermon be *very pressing*, it might be here stated to advantage.

^f Eph. iv. 28. ^g Mark xii. 41—44. ^h 2 Cor. viii. 12.

ⁱ Luke vi. 36.

he cannot *lend* a larger. Persons therefore must judge for themselves in such particulars as these; and regulate their conduct according to their circumstances.]

2. The necessities of those to apply to us—

[To offer to a person who has been suddenly brought from affluent circumstances to poverty, such a pittance as we might give to a beggar, would be to mock and insult him: and, on the other hand, to bestow on a common beggar what would be suited to the other case, would be most unpardonable profusion. Besides, we must judge whether there exist any necessity at all: for, if we will give to all who are willing to ask, and lend to all who are willing to borrow, we shall soon exhaust our own resources, however great they may be: and, by giving or lending where there is no necessity, we shall incapacitate ourselves for assisting those who are in real distress. Here then, doubtless, is scope for the exercise of discretion: and true liberality, instead of prohibiting such discretion, demands it at our hands.]

3. The prospect there is of our aid being effectual for the relief of him who asks it—

[Here is an *idle* man, who will do nothing for his own maintenance; a *prodigal* man, who never thinks of the use of money; a *drunken* and *profligate* man, who wastes all his substance in riotous living: to what purpose shall you exert yourself in any great degree for such persons? Give them all that you have, and they will soon be poor again. The best way to relieve such persons, is to provide labour for them, and to make a reformation of their conduct necessary for their own subsistence. Sometimes a seasonable loan may enable a person to provide for his family, when, without such aid, he could not attain the situation which is open for him. *There*, to strain a point for him, is both liberal and wise: but where the case is such as occurs daily all around us, we must so give, as that we may have a reserve to *lend*; and so *lend*, as that we may have a reserve to *give*. There are some cases, however, where we may well be absolved from either giving or lending, unless indeed just to supply the necessities of the moment; I mean, where a person's circumstances are so involved, that all we can do for him would be only as a drop in the ocean. *There*, if by public contributions we can aid him, well: but, if not, to impoverish ourselves without benefiting him, would be, not piety, but folly.]

It will not be unprofitable to subjoin a few HINTS for the use of,

1. Those

1. Those who *want* relief—

[Many will ask a gift or loan without any real necessity. But such persons should reflect, that whilst they trespass thus on the liberality of the rich, they are themselves oppressors of the poor. It is in no person's power to give to *every one* that asketh, or to lend to *every one* that would borrow; (for though St. Luke so expresses it, the direction must be limited in the nature of things^k;) and consequently, they who by unnecessary applications exhaust the funds of a liberal man, deprive him of the power of doing good to others, who need it more. None therefore should take undue advantage of the piety of others, or seek from others what by increased activity they might furnish from their own resources.

Another point of great importance is, that they who borrow, should adhere strictly to their word, as to the season of repaying the loan. It is incredible, how much they who violate their engagements in this respect, discourage and (I had almost said) harden the hearts of those who delight in doing good. I know it is said, "Do good and lend, hoping for *nothing* again^l:" and, if we be told, that the prospect of repayment is distant and uncertain, the duty is comparatively easy: but, when we are told that at such a season the loan shall be repaid, and find that the borrower thinks no more of his promises, or (as is frequently the case) asks a little forbearance in the first instance, and then, on finding it *kindly* exercised, construes that kindness into a forgiveness of the debt, *that* conduct has a sad tendency to wound the feelings of the liberal, and to make them averse to lend. *In this view*, therefore, the injury which such wicked people do, is exceeding great. I call them "wicked;" for so the Psalmist designates them; "The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again^m." Nor is it their benefactors only whom they injure, but society at large; inasmuch as they prevent the exercise of benevolence towards many people far worthier than themselves. To all therefore who have contracted such obligations, I would recommend tenfold diligence and self-denial, till they have executed their engagements, and fulfilled their word.]

2. To those who *impart* it—

[It sometimes happens, that even in the generous mind a niggardly thought will arise, and a backwardness to exercise the benevolence that is called for. Against such thoughts God has very strongly cautioned usⁿ: and we shall

^k Luke vi. 30.^l ib. ver. 35.^m Ps. xxxvii. 21.ⁿ Deut. xv. 7—11.

shall do well to be on our guard against them. We should be careful “not to be weary in well-doing.” We should remember, that God himself is pledged for the repayment of all that we either give or lend, *provided we act from a principle of faith and love*°. The best means of preventing such an evil thought is certainly to get the soul impressed with a sense of Christ’s love in dying for us^p — — — But, next to that, it will be well to reflect, that we are only *stewards* of what we possess; and that, though no *individual* has an absolute claim upon us, the poor at large have: a portion of our property is their “due,” and we ought to pay it *without delay*^q. Let then every one lay by a portion of his income for benevolent uses^r, and bear in mind, that both his present and future happiness will be augmented in proportion to his liberality^s.]

° Prov. xix. 17.

^p 2 Cor. viii. 9.^q Prov. iii. 27, 28.^r 1 Cor. xvi. 2.^s 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7.

DCLXXXI.

LOVE TO ENEMIES ENJOINED.

Matt. v. 43—48. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust. For, if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

IT is well said by the Psalmist, that “the commandment of God is exceeding broad;” since it reaches to every disposition of the mind, and requires infinitely more than man, in his present weak and degenerate state, can perform. Indeed, though many traces of the law still remain upon the heart, and are discoverable by the light of reason, there are depths in it which unaided reason could never have fathomed, and a breadth and length

length which it could never have explored. Amongst the precepts which we consider as known only through the medium of Revelation, we would particularly specify that which is contained in the text. Human nature would itself approve of love to *friends*; but our Lord commands us to love our enemies.

In discoursing on the text, we shall be led to consider,

I. The duty inculcated—

The Jewish teachers in general sanctioned the indulgence of *hatred* towards enemies—

[We must, in justice to them, acknowledge that they had some shadow of reason for their opinions: for God had commanded the Jews entirely to extirpate the Canaanites: and, though some little favour was to be shewn to the Edomites and Egyptians^a, the Ammonites and Moabites and Midianites were never to be treated with kindness^b; and “the very remembrance of the Amalekites was to be blotted out from under heaven^c.” Moreover, the duty of love seemed to be restricted to those of their own nation^d: and in case even a Jew should accidentally kill any person, the man who was the nearest relative of the deceased was at liberty to kill the man-slayer, in case he could overtake him before he could enter into a city of refuge, or should be able afterwards to find him without the gates of that city^e.

But these mistaken teachers did not consider that a commandment given in relation to those *devoted nations* was not intended to be made a rule of conduct between *individuals*: nor did they recollect, that, whilst they restricted the word “neighbour” to those of their own nation, the Decalogue itself had taught them to comprehend the whole universe under that name^f: (for a Jew was no more at liberty to “covet the wife” of a Heathen, than he was of a Jew.) Nor, lastly, did they reflect, that the ordinance relative to the man-slayer was altogether typical of Christ and of his salvation^g.]

In opposition to such erroneous notions, our Lord enjoined, in the most authoritative manner, the *love* of enemies—

[He

^a Deut. xxiii. 7.

^b ib. ver. 3, 6. & Numb. xxv. 16—18.

^c Deut. xxv. 17—19.

^d Lev. xix. 17, 18.

^e Numb. xxxv. 26, 27.

^f Exod. xx. 17.

^g Heb. vi. 18.

[He takes for granted, that his faithful disciples would be "hated, reviled, and persecuted:" and under all the evil treatment which they may receive, he commands them to return *kind words* for *bitter*, *benevolent actions* for *spiteful*, and *fervent prayers* for the most *cruel oppressions*. Not that this was any *new* precept: it was enjoined under the law as strongly as under the Gospel^b; and was exemplified too under the legal dispensation, in almost as eminent a degree as even by the Apostles themselves^c. There is this difference, indeed, that the exercise of such heavenly tempers was less frequent among the Jews, because few of them comparatively attained to any high degrees of piety: whereas, now that "the Spirit is poured out more abundantly" upon the Church, this is a *common* attainment, or rather, I should say, an *universal* attainment, amongst all who are truly converted unto God. Our blessed Lord set us the example, "going as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers, not opening his mouth," either in threatenings or complaints^d. Even in the agonies of crucifixion he prayed for his murderers^e, as Stephen also did in his dying moments^f, and thousands of others also have done amidst the flames of martyrdom. This is our duty, even in such extreme cases as are here supposed; and consequently must be so in all cases of inferior moment.]

However difficult this duty may appear, we shall address ourselves cheerfully to the performance of it, if only we consider,

II. The reasons for performing it—

The Lord's people are represented by the Apostle as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that they should shew forth the praises (or *virtues*) of him that hath called them^g." But how are they to answer this great end of their calling? It is very principally by attending to this duty. By their performance of it they are to mark,

1. Their resemblance to God—

[The whole race of mankind, with comparatively few exceptions, is up in arms against God. A very great proportion

^b Compare Rom. xii. 20, 21. with Prov. xxv. 21, 22.

^c 2 Chron. xxviii. 15. Ps. xxxv. 12—14.

^d Isai. liii. 7. with 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

^e Acts vii. 60.

^f Luke xxiii. 34.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 9.

portion of them are bowing down to stocks and stones : and almost all, even of those who acknowledge the one true God, are yet denying him daily, and shewing their enmity to him by wicked works. But how does he requite them ? Does he avail himself of his power to deprive them of every comfort, and to punish them all according to their deserts ? No : with much long-suffering he endures all their provocations, notwithstanding they are “ vessels of wrath already fitted for destruction :” he even loads them indiscriminately with all the bounties of his Providence, “ making his sun to rise equally on the evil and on the good, and sending rain equally on the just and on the unjust.” In like manner must we act towards those who injure us. We must bear with them, and do them good according to our ability : and *it is by such conduct only that we can approve ourselves his children*. Let us not, however, be misunderstood : it is not necessary that we should deal with such persons altogether as our *friends* : for even God himself does not do *that* : he comes to his own people in a more intimate manner, and “ sups with them,” and “ makes his abode with them,” and “ manifests himself unto *them* as he does not unto the world.” Thus also may we do. There is a love of benevolence, a love of beneficence, and a love of complacency, if we may so speak : the two former must be exercised towards all : the last may fitly be reserved for those who alone possess the dispositions worthy of it. Such a preference God himself authorizes, when he says, “ Do good unto all men, but especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”]

2. Their superiority to an ungodly world—

[God will not be satisfied with seeing his people live after the manner of the ungodly. To what purpose have they been “ redeemed,” if they are to retain the same “ vain conversation” which those around them do ? To what purpose have “ their eyes been opened to behold the wondrous things of God’s law,” to what purpose have they been adopted into his family, and been filled with his Spirit, and been made heirs of his inheritance, if they are not to walk worthy of their high calling ? Are their superior knowledge, obligations, prospects, and assistances, to have no *practical* influence upon their lives ? The vilest of publicans and sinners will love and benefit their *friends* ; and is this a standard for God’s redeemed people ? No : they must love their *enemies* : else, “ *What do they more than others ?* Surely, if we are no better than others in
our

our dispositions and conduct, we shall be no better than them in our eternal destiny.]

That we may have a more complete view of this duty, let us inquire into,

III. The extent to which it is to be performed—

The law of God is at once the *rule* and *measure* of our duty—

[The law is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God. It was originally written upon the heart of man: and man's perfect conformity to it constituted that image of God in which he was created. To have these dispositions restored, and thereby to regain that image, is the object which we are taught to aspire after with incessant ardour. God has promised to his people that they shall be "renewed after his image in righteousness and true holiness:" and of that promise we must seek the full accomplishment. To dream of a conformity to God's *natural* perfections, were folly and madness; we cannot possibly be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent; but his *moral* perfections we *may* and *must* attain: nor ought we to be satisfied with any precise measure of them; we should never think we have attained any thing whilst any thing remains to be attained.]

To a perfect conformity to that law we must be ever pressing forward—

[This was St. Paul's mind. After he had preached the Gospel for twenty years, and had attained an eminence of piety which probably none but the Lord Jesus Christ himself ever surpassed, he said, "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of God in Christ Jesus." Nor is this a pursuit proper for Apostles only; it is equally necessary for all. "Now are we the sons of God," says St. John: "and every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure." In a word, the model for our imitation is God: nor must we ever stop, till we are "holy as God is holy," and "perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."]

We cannot contemplate this subject without
NOTICING,

1. What need we have of mercy at the hands of God—

[Let us look back through our whole lives, and see
how

^p Phil. iii. 12.

^s 1 John iii. 2, 3.

how numberless have been our transgressions against this holy law; and let us look into our own hearts, and see what a proneness there is in us yet daily and hourly to transgress it. Who does not find, that, when injured and insulted, his heart is ready to rise against his adversary in a way of retaliation and invective? Who does not feel, that, without the divine assistance, he can no more maintain the exalted spirit here spoken of, than he can create a world? — — — Let us then humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes. Let us acknowledge our desert of his heavy displeasure, and our need of pardon through the blood of Christ. Let us at the same time implore the assistance of his Holy Spirit, that we may be enabled to “walk as Christ walked,” and to exercise that kindness towards others which we desire and hope for when standing before his tribunal — — —]

2. What encouragement we have to expect mercy at his hands—

[Has God required *us* to love our enemies, even whilst they are manifesting towards us their enmity to the utmost of their power; and will not *he himself* shew mercy to us, when we lay down the weapons of our rebellion? Again; has he required of us such tempers as fruits of our conversion; and will he refuse us that grace which is necessary to produce them? Assuredly not. If he gives the bounties of his *providence* to his most inveterate *enemies*, he will surely give the blessings of his *grace* to his suppliant and repenting *friends*? Let not then a sense of past guilt appal us, or a sense of present weakness discourage us: but let us “go boldly to the throne of Grace, that we obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need.”]

DCLXXXII.

CHRISTIANS DO MORE THAN OTHERS.

Matt. v. 47. *What do ye more than others?*

OUR Lord is here rescuing the law from the false glosses with which the Scribes and Pharisees had obscured it. It is quite a mistake to imagine that he extended the law beyond its original meaning. The law was perfect, being a perfect transcript of God's mind and will. Had it required less than it now does, it would have been unworthy

worthy of God: in fact, unless its demands are now extended beyond what they ought to be (which we know is not the case,) it must have given men a license to love God and our neighbour less than we really ought; or, in other words, it would have given a license to sin. The particular command to which our Lord refers in the context was, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This the Scribes and Pharisees interpreted as giving a liberty, if not an absolute command, to hate our enemies. But our Lord shews, that every man, whether friend or enemy, is comprehended in the term "neighbour," and that every man therefore has a claim upon us to be loved by us as ourselves. If we extend our regards to friends only, "What," says our Lord, "do ye more than others?" This is a very pointed question, importing that the Lord's people ought to do more than others, and may reasonably be expected to do so. In confirmation of this truth, I will,

I. Shew why the Lord's people may reasonably be expected to do more than others—

The question is founded in reason and justice: for, if we be the Lord's people in truth,

1. We are more indebted to him than others—

[All are indebted to him for the gift of a Saviour, and for the offer of eternal life through him. (Of temporal blessings such as the whole world partake of, I forbear to speak.) But true Christians are indebted not merely for a gift of the Saviour to them, but for *having from eternity been given to the Saviour* as his peculiar people, whom he should redeem from death, and enjoy for ever as "his purchased possession." It is surprising how often our blessed Lord speaks of them under this character in his last intercessory prayer^a—— And it is always mentioned as a distinguishing mercy, that raises them far above the rest of the world, and entails the greatest obligations upon them. Moreover, *the faith by which they are brought into this union with Christ* is also the gift of God. "To them it is given in the behalf of Christ to believe in him^b." And this is no less a distinguishing mercy than the other: for the whole world, with the exception of this little remnant, are in unbelief.

^a John xvii. 2, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 24.

^b Phil. i. 29.

unbelief. *The peace too that flows from this union, oh! what an inestimable gift is that!* "To the wicked there is no peace:" but these have "a peace which passeth all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and glorified."

Say, whether this be not a very abundant reason for our shewing to God more gratitude than others, and labouring to serve him with every faculty both of body and soul?]

2. We have greater assistances from him than others—

[Every man has, more or less, what may be called the common influences of the Spirit. For there is no man who has not occasionally felt some compunction for his sins, and some desire of amendment. But whence do "these good thoughts and holy desires proceed, but from God?" They would no more arise in the heart of fallen man than of the fallen angels, if they were not suggested by the Spirit of God^c. But Believers have what may be called the special grace of God; by which I understand, not a different *kind* of grace, but a different degree, even such a degree as shall prevail over all the resistance which it meets with in the soul^d. Nor is it only in order to their first conversion to God that they are so wrought upon, but through the whole of their lives are they preserved and strengthened by the same Spirit, in order to their final salvation^e. To what a degree this strength is communicated to them, may be seen in various passages of Holy Writ: it is equal to that which God exerted in raising up Jesus Christ from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand, above all the principalities and powers of earth and hell^f. It is such as to display the powers of omnipotence itself^g, and to approve itself the workmanship of Him who created the universe out of nothing^h.

All this is unknown to others, who, having never earnestly implored this aid, are left under the power of Satan, and are "carried captive by the devil at his will." And is not this a call upon them for exertion? And does it not afford a just ground of expectation, that they shall do more than others who have no such assistance?]

3. We make a greater profession of zeal for God than others—

[The generality not only make no particular profession of

^c 2 Cor. iii. 5. & v. 5.

^e 1 Thess. v. 23.

^g Eph. iii. 16. & Col. i. 11.

^d Ps. cx. 3. Phil. ii. 13.

^f Eph. i. 19, 20, 21.

^h Eph. ii. 10. 2 Cor. v. 17.

of love to God, but account this very want of profession a sufficient reason for all the carelessness and indifference which they manifest. But the Believer does not thus glory in his shame. He knows his obligations to God; nor is he ashamed to confess them. He knows that he has been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son; and that, "having been bought with a price, he is bound to glorify God with his body and his spirit, which are God's!" He considers himself as called to die unto the world," yea, to be "crucified unto it, and to have it crucified unto him, by the cross of Christ^k." He acknowledges that "his affections are to be set, not upon things below, but on things above^l:" and that he has nothing to do in this world but to prepare for a better. Hence, if occasion require, he speaks of himself as running in a race, wrestling for the mastery, and engaged in a warfare. These things he professes, not from vain ostentation, but from necessity; or rather, he does not so much *profess* them as *do* them: and the profession is rather the result of his efforts, than any declaration independent of them. As far as mere profession is concerned, he would rather be silent than talkative: but his life speaks; and he is content that it should speak, if only it may afford a light which may be instructive and animating to those around him.

But this profession, whether voluntary or not, calls for consistency in his conduct, and makes it indispensable for him, whilst calling himself "a child of light and of the day," not to walk as those who are children of darkness and of the night^m."]

4. God's honour is more involved in our conduct than in that of others—

[Others may do what they will, and no one thinks of reflecting on religion on their account. Nay, even the grossest immoralities may be committed by them, without exciting any surprise, or attracting any notice. But let a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ do any thing amiss, and the whole world hears of it: nor is he only who commits the evil condemned, but all who are connected with him in the same religious society are blamed also; yea, and all religious persons generally, as being all alike. Even the Gospel itself too is condemned as sanctioning such conduct, and as having a natural tendency to produce it. The general feeling on such an occasion is that of exultation and triumph: "There, there! so would we have itⁿ." Had Saul committed the evils which David did, though the

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^m 1 Thess. v. 6—8.

^k Gal. vi. 14.

ⁿ Ps. xxxv. 25.

^l Col. iii. i. act

act might have been blamed, God's honour would not have suffered. But when David sinned, "the name of God was everywhere blasphemed on his account^o."

What an obligation then does this lay on Christians to "walk holily, justly, and unblameably" before men, that "the way of truth may not be evil spoken of through them?" If there is a "woe unto the world because of the offences" which are committed in the Church, and which harden multitudes in their infidelity, much more does woe attach to that man who commits the offences, and casts a stumbling-block in the way of others, to the destruction of their souls as well as of his own^r. In proportion therefore as any deviation from the path of duty in us may prove injurious to God's honour and the interests of his Gospel, we are bound to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise^r;" that all who behold our light may be led rather to approve of our principles, and to glorify our God^s.]

If our obligation to approve ourselves "more excellent than our neighbours" has been established^t, let us,

II. Inquire what we do more than others—

What do we more,

1. For our own souls?

[The world, alas! evince but little concern for their own souls. A formal round of duties is all that they judge necessary: and if they are observant of the outward decencies of religion, such as frequenting the House of God, attending upon the Lord's table, maintaining family prayer, and repeating some form of devotion twice a day in their closets, they think they have done all that is required of them, and are ready to say, "What lack I more?" But all this may be only "a form of godliness, without the power^x," and a service wholly unacceptable to the heart-searching God^r.

"What then do ye more than this?" Are all of you doing even as much? Are not even these *forms* neglected by too many? But supposing you to be observant of these, what do ye more? Alas! the generality would be utterly at a loss to answer this question. But the true Christian shall answer it, even though he be only at present as "a babe in Christ." Do you ask me, What I do more? (he may say,) I search out my sins yet daily, in order

^o 2 Sam. xii. 14.

^r Eph. v. 15.

^u Matt. xix. 20.

^p 2 Pet. ii. 2.

^s Matt. v. 16.

^x 2 Tim. iii. 5.

^q Matt. xviii. 7.

^t Prov. xii. 26.

^y Matt. xv. 7—9.

order to humble myself before God on account of them. I mourn over all that I have seen amiss in my whole conduct through life. I sigh, I groan, I weep, I smite upon my breast from day to day, crying, God, be merciful to me a sinner! I flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge: renounce utterly all other ground of hope: I trust altogether in his atoning sacrifice, as expiating my guilt, and reconciling me to my offended God. I set my face towards Zion: and, though I travel not so expeditiously as I could wish, I make it my daily labour to advance; and I make no account of any difficulties, if only I may get forward in my heavenly way. The one concern of my life from day to day is, How shall I save my soul? "What shall it profit me if I gain the whole world, and lose my own soul?"

Now, my dear Brethren, is this your state? are you thus concerned about your souls? and does your conscience bear witness, that, whilst others are occupied chiefly about the things of time and sense, "you account the whole world but as dross and dung, that you may win Christ, and be found in him, not having your own righteousness, but his?" Is this, I say, your state? Is it the state of *all* amongst you? of *all*? Oh! would to God it were! But, if the truth were known, and it is most assuredly known to God, there are but few who can truly declare this to be the daily habit of their minds: yet must it be *your* habit, if ever you would be Christians indeed, and behold the face of God in peace.]

2. For the honour of our God—

[Little is this thought of by the world at large. But the true Christians are not unconcerned about it. They know that God may be honoured by them: and it is their most anxious desire to bring glory to their God. There is not a perfection of the Deity which they do not endeavour to honour and exalt: his omniscience, by walking as in his immediate presence: his omnipotence, by committing altogether to him their every concern: his love, his mercy, his truth, his faithfulness, by embracing his gracious offers in the Gospel, and relying on his promises as a sure ground of their hope. They walk with him, as Enoch did: they maintain "fellowship with him and with his Son Jesus Christ" all the day long^a: accounting it their chief joy to have a sense of his presence, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon them. In their actions, they consider not what will advance their own honour or interests, but what will promote his glory: and, having ascertained

^a Phil. iii. 7—9.

^a 1 John i. 3.

ascertained that, they go forward in the prosecution of it, without any regard to consequences: a fiery furnace, or a den of lions, has no terrors for them: they fear nothing but sin: and account it an honour and a privilege to lay down life itself in His service, and for His glory ^b.

And now let me ask, Is it thus with *all* of you? Are *all* of you thus studious to exalt, to honour, and to glorify your God? Have earthly things no value in your eyes, in comparison of God's favour, and of his love shed abroad in your hearts? Yet without this you cannot be Christians indeed. Our blessed Lord has said, that "Whoso loveth his life shall lose it; and that he only who is willing to lose it for his sake, shall find it unto life eternal ^c."]]

3. For the benefit of mankind—

[To this there is a special respect in my text. The Pharisees maintained, that we were at liberty to hate our enemies: but our Lord said, "If you love your friends only, what do ye more than others?" The loving of enemies is an attainment far above the reach of the world at large. If they abstain from revenge, it is quite as much as they ever aim at. And as for endeavouring to "win the souls" of their enemies, the thought never so much as enters into their minds. But the true Christian has a far higher standard of duty in reference to these things. He feels, indeed, that it is no easy thing to "love his enemies, to bless them that curse him, to do good to them that hate him, and to pray for them that spitefully use him and persecute him ^d," but he labours to do it, and implores grace from God that he may be able to do it; and determines, through grace, "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good." Nor is he forgetful of his obligation to seek the eternal welfare of mankind. Hence he labours for the diffusion of the Sacred Oracles throughout the world: he finds delight in aiding every effort that is made for the salvation both of Jews and Gentiles: and in his more immediate neighbourhood he strives to promote, as far as in him lies, the spiritual and eternal interests of all around him. In his relative duties also especially he endeavours to shew the influence of true religion: as a parent or child, as a husband or wife, as a master or servant, as a ruler or subject, he makes a point of fulfilling his duties, so that the most watchful enemy shall have no reason to speak reproachfully.]

Once more then let me ask, Is it thus with you? Is there amongst all of you such government of your own tempers, and such a victory over all your evil passions, as that

^b Phil. ii. 17, 18.

^c Matt. x. 39.

^d ver. 44.

that you adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and exhibit in the whole of your deportment his blessed image? As followers of Christ, all this is required of you: you are called, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, to put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; and to be forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if you have a quarrel against any man, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you:" and if you will approve yourselves to be Christ's, "your righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees." You must take even God himself for your pattern; and seek to be "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect^f."]

SEE then,

1. How vain is that plea, that you are as good as others!

[Before that plea can be of any avail, you must inquire whether others are as holy as they ought to be: for if they be not, your equality with them can be no ground of satisfaction in the prospect of the future judgment. What consolation will it be to those who shall experience the wrath of God in hell, that they were as good as any who walked in "the broad road that led them to destruction?" It is not by any human standard that you will be judged in the last day, but by the standard of God's unerring word: and whether you be as good or better than others, it will avail you nothing, if you be not found such as God requires, "Israelites indeed, and without guile"— — —]

2. How desirable is it to have our evidences of piety clear and decisive!

[The question put to us in the text, will be put to us in the last day; "What did ye more than others?" This question we ought to be able to answer now, in order that we may give a satisfactory answer then: and the more satisfactorily we can answer it now, the more comfort we shall have in looking forward to that day, and the more boldness when we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ^g. Whatever then ye have attained, forget it all, and press forward for yet higher attainments^h, that so, whenever the day of Christ shall arrive, ye may rejoice, "and not be ashamed before him at his comingⁱ."]

^e Col. iii. 12, 13.

^f ver. 20, & 48.

^g 1 John iii. 20, 21. & iv. 17.

^h Phil. iii. 13, 14.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 28.

DCLXXXIII.

DIRECTIONS RESPECTING ALMS-DEEDS.

Matt. vi. 1—4. *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men: verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.*

THERE are some duties so plain and obvious, that it is scarcely necessary to insist upon men's obligation to perform them. Amongst these is the duty of relieving our fellow-creatures in distress, and making our abundance instrumental to the supply of their necessities. Our blessed Lord takes it for granted that all his disciples will be found observant of the duty itself; and therefore does not stop to inculcate the necessity of it; but merely gives directions respecting it, that it may be performed most beneficially to themselves, and most honourably to God. Instead of the word, which in the first verse is translated "alms," there is in the margin of our Bibles, the word "righteousness;" which, on the whole, is the preferable reading; as it avoids the tautology which there manifestly is in the passage as it now stands. The passage according to this reading requires, first, that our righteousness in general should be devoid of ostentation; and, next, that we should guard against ostentation, more especially in those several duties, which, as Christians, we are bound to perform. We are called to serve God with our *souls*, our *bodies*, and *estates*; and we must do the first by *prayer*, the second by *fasting*, and the third by *alms*.

Whichever reading we adopt, our subject will be the same: we shall be led to consider the
 directions

directions which our Lord gives us in reference to alms. He tells us,

I. What we are to avoid—

A very principal feature in the character of the Pharisees was, *ostentation*: “they did all their works in order to be seen of men.” Against this in particular our Lord cautions us—

1. It is an evil to which we are prone—

[Whilst the caution itself implies this, (“Take heed,”) the experience of every individual attests it. Who does not feel a desire after the applause of man? Who does not consult in too great a degree the opinion of those around him? The more decent amongst the unconverted, seem to be actuated by no other motive: whilst even the godly themselves are by no means exempt from its influence. It is not, however, without much self-knowledge and self-examination that we can discern the workings of this principle within us. We give ourselves credit for better motives and better principles, at the time that impartial observers mark distinctly the obliquity of our dispositions and conduct.]

2. It is an evil most carefully to be avoided—

[The bestowing of alms, like every thing else, must be judged of by the motive from which it springs: when done in order to acquire a character for benevolence and liberality, it is pride; when with a view to the obtaining of influence, it is ambition. It is then only to be deemed piety and charity, when it is produced by a concern for God’s honour, and from real love to our fellow-creatures. Precisely in proportion as any sinister motive actuates us, the action, how good soever it may be in other respects, is debased. It is not only stripped of all the good which it might otherwise have, but has in it a positive infusion of evil. Our blessed Lord called those “hypocrites,” who, in distributing their alms, sought to draw the attention and admiration of the public: and such are all who tread in their steps. If our actions proceed from principles different from those which are pretended and avowed, we may palliate them as we please; but God will affix to them no other name than that of vile *hypocrisy*. It is scarcely needful, methinks, to say, that such a disposition must be put away with abhorrence.

But there is yet a farther reason for guarding against this evil; namely, that actions proceeding from such a principle can never be accepted of God. They may, and probably will, procure us the reward we seek after: they may render us popular,

popular, gain us applause, increase our influence, and bring us into high repute for liberality and goodness: but they will never receive any reward from God: they are not done *for him*; and therefore he will not accept them: they have no real piety in them; and therefore he will not reward them. We can easily see, that, if a person should spend ever so large a sum in feeding those by whose suffrages he is to be raised to eminence and distinction, he would not for a moment imagine that he laid God under any kind of obligation, or was entitled to expect any remuneration from him: the sums he lavished were the price of his worldly honours. Thus, as far as pride, or ostentation, or vanity, or worldly interest, excite us to liberality, we renounce all claim upon God. He has said indeed, that “what we give to the poor, we lend to him; and that he will repay it^a,” but he will never acknowledge as a loan to him, what was given by us to purchase the applause of man. Supposing it was pure gold in the first instance, we turn it all to dross the very moment we begin to pride ourselves in it.

In both these views then the caution deserves our deepest attention, and ought to be followed with the greatest care.]

Having told us what to avoid, our Lord proceeds to inform us,

II. What we should observe and do—

We should, to the utmost of our power, affect secrecy—

[Doubtless there are occasions whereon we are called to dispense charity in a more public manner, and when the concealment of our name would have an injurious effect. On such occasions we do right to “let our light shine before men.” But, in all such instances, we should have the testimony of our own consciences, that it is the honour of God, and not our own honour, that we seek. Where no such necessity is imposed upon us, we should “not let our left hand know what our right hand doeth:” we should hide our good deeds *from others*; we should hide them also *from ourselves*. Where we have not made an open parade of our charities, but have conformed to this precept as it respects others, we yet are too apt to contemplate our own actions with a very undue measure of self-complacency. Though we have not studied to make them public, we are delighted to find that they are known; and are pleased with the thought that we stand high in the estimation of others. The oblique hints which are suggested to us respecting the extent of our benevolence, and the great-

ness

^a Prov. xix. 17.

ness of the benefits we have conferred, are very gratifying to our proud hearts: and the accidental discovery of our goodness is relished by us, as a rich equivalent for the self-denial we exercised in concealing it. Alas! what deceitful hearts we have! At the very time that we profess to avoid the notice of others, we are "sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag!" If we view our actions aright, they will furnish us rather with grounds of humiliation and gratitude. For, how small are our utmost exertions, in comparison with the greatness of our obligations, or the extent of our duty! What reason have we also to be ashamed of the mixture of principle, which has often operated to the production of them!—And more particularly, what reason have we to adore and magnify our God, who has deigned to make use of such unworthy instruments for the good of his people and the glory of his name! *This* is the light in which our benevolence should be viewed; *this* is the spirit in which it should be exercised.]

What we do secretly for God shall be openly rewarded by him—

[He notices with approbation the hidden purposes of our heart: and every man who seeks only the praise of God shall assuredly obtain it: God will look not at the sums we give, but at the motive and principle from which we give it: and even "a cup of cold water given with a single eye to his glory, shall in no wise lose its reward." Even a desire which we were not able to carry into effect shall be accepted of him, even as David's was, who desired to build an house for the Lord: "Thou didst well, in that it was in thine heart." How far God will recompense our liberality with present comforts, we cannot absolutely determine; but he will surely "recompense it at the resurrection of the just; and he would account himself unrighteous, if he were to forget to do so^b. This; however, we must always bear in mind, that our actions are always exalted in God's estimation in proportion as they are lowered in our own: and that the persons whom he represents as honoured and rewarded by him; are those who were altogether unconscious of their own excellencies, and were surprised to hear of services noticed by their Judge, which were overlooked and forgotten by themselves^c."]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. How impossible it is for any man to be justified by the works of the law—

[We inquire not now into any kind of gross sin: we will

^b Heb. vi. 10.

^c Matt. xxv. 44.

will suppose that all of us are free from any imputation of that kind; and that our lives have been altogether spent in doing good: yet who amongst us would present his alms-deeds before the heart-searching God, and defy him to find a flaw in them?—— If we cannot do that, we must renounce all confidence in the flesh, and rely only on the meritorious sacrifice of the Lord Jesus ——]

2. How thankful we should be that a Saviour is provided for us—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is come into the world to seek and save us. He is that Great High Priest who “bears the iniquity of our holy things,” and will clothe us with the unspotted robe of his righteousness, provided we are willing to put off “the filthy rags of our own.” Let us look then to him, whose works alone were perfect. Let us remember, that “though we know nothing by ourselves, yet are we not hereby justified:” God may have seen much obliquity in us, where we ourselves may have been perfectly unconscious of it: but if, on the whole, our “eye has been single,” our imperfections shall be pardoned, and our services be recompensed with “an eternal great reward.”]

DCLXXXIV.

DIRECTIONS RESPECTING PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 5—8. *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

WHAT David spoke respecting the Pentateuch, is strongly exemplified in the sermon on the Mount; “By it are God’s servants warned.” Both sins and duties are here exhibited to us in their proper light: the sins of the heart are reprobated, no less than those of the outward act: and the duties which

which are performed without proper motives and dispositions are shewn to be void of any real worth. Hence we are warned to look chiefly at the heart, and to judge of our state entirely by what we find there. If, for instance, we have been in the habit of dispensing alms, we must not *therefore* conclude that we have pleased God, unless, upon an examination of our own hearts, we have the testimony of our conscience that we *desired* to please him. In like manner, if we have been given to prayer, we must not imagine that our prayers have been accepted, unless they have been offered in sincerity and truth. To this effect, our Lord teaches us in the words of our text; in which he gives us directions respecting prayer, and guards us against those dispositions which are too frequently indulged in the performance of that duty.

I. Against hypocrisy—

An ostentatious display of devotion is most hateful to God—

[The Pharisees of old were intent only on gaining the applause of man. Hence, on every occasion, they acted a part, as players on a stage^a. Even their private devotions were made subservient to their main design^a, and were ostentatiously displayed in places of public concourse. They pretended to have so much reverence for God, that they would not defer their accustomed services even for a few minutes, but would perform them in the corner of a street, or in any other place, however conspicuous and frequented; whilst, in reality, the whole was a contrivance, in order to attract notice, and obtain a high reputation for sanctity. Such persons our Lord justly calls “hypocrites,” and their services he declares to be altogether unacceptable to the heart-searching God.

These precise habits are no longer seen; but the disposition from whence they arose, prevails as much as ever. We shall not now speak of formalists, who frequent the House of God in order to be accounted religious, because we shall notice them under another head: but there are many in the religious world who very nearly resemble the Pharisees of old, whilst they themselves have not the least

idea

^a Πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι, in ver. 1, seems to convey this idea.

idea that there is any such defect in their character. I refer to those who are forward to pray and to expound the Scriptures in religious societies, whilst they have no delight in secret prayer, but only in displaying their gifts and talents. I would notice those also, who, in the House of God, use unnecessary peculiarities, whether of voice or gesture, in order that they may appear to be pre-eminently devout. Nor must we overlook those, who carry the same hypocritical desires even into their own closets, and contrive, either by the loudness or the length of their devotions, to convey to their families an idea of transcendent piety. But such dispositions, by whomsoever indulged, are hateful to God: and in proportion as we are actuated by them, we debase our best services, and render them an abomination to the Lord.]

In all our approaches to God, we should rather affect privacy and retirement—

[Doubtless, when in the House of God, we ought to conduct ourselves with the deepest reverence: nor should we be afraid of the observations which may be made upon us by ungodly men. Whatever consequences may attend a reverential regard for God, we ought not to put our light under a bushel; but should, like Daniel, brave death itself, rather than for a moment deny our God^b. But where our devotions are professedly private, and no necessity is imposed upon us, we should shun every thing which has the appearance of ostentation or vain-glory, and study to approve ourselves to HIM only, “who seeth in secret.” It is his approbation only that we should regard; and from him only should we seek “a recompence of reward.”]

At the same time it becomes us to be equally on our guard,

II. Against superstition—

Superstitious services are scarcely less common than those which are hypocritical—

[The Heathen imagined that their gods were to be moved by long services and vain repetitions. Hence the worshippers of Baäl cried to him, “O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!” and continued their cry from morning to noon, and with increased earnestness from noon to evening^c. And to this hour a great part of the Christian world (the Papists, I mean) continue a superstition as absurd as any that can be found in the Heathen world: they repeat their *Ave-Marias*

^b Dan. vi. 10.

^c 1 Kin. xviii. 26—29.

Ave-Marias and their *Paternosters* a great number of times; (keeping an account thereof with their beads;) and then think that they have performed an acceptable service to the Lord, though they have not offered to him one spiritual petition. Happy were it if such superstition were confined to them: but the same thing obtains also amongst ourselves. What is more common than for persons to attend the House of God, and to go through the service in a dull formal manner, and then to return home satisfied with having performed a duty to their God? Yet the religion of many who fancy themselves devout, consists in nothing but a repetition of such services: and if these services be repeated on the week days as well as on the Sabbath, they take credit to themselves for possessing all the piety that God requires. In some things, I confess, these persons set an example worthy the imitation of the religious world: they are always *in their places at the beginning of the service*; and they shew a becoming attention to it throughout the whole, both in their *reverent postures* and their *audible responses*: and, if my voice could reach to every professor of religion throughout the world, I would say, LEARN OF THEM; and *as far as these things go*, IMITATE THEM. Still, however, inasmuch as the religion of these persons consists in forms only, without any suitable emotions of the heart, it is no better than the worship of the Heathen: our Lord himself says, that “in vain do any persons worship him, who draw nigh to him with their lips, whilst their hearts are far from him^d.”

Some who are truly enlightened, have yet the remains of this old leaven within them; and are apt to judge of their state, rather by the number and length of their services, than by the spirituality of their minds in them: and *it would be well if some who minister in holy things, and who multiply their services beyond what their strength will endure, would attend to this hint.*]

But we should have more correct notions of the Deity, than to imagine that he requires, or accepts, such services as these—

[We mean not to say, that persons may not profitably and acceptably prolong their services to any extent, when their spirits are devout and their hearts are enlarged; for our Lord himself spent whole nights in prayer and in communion with his God: nor do we say, that all repetitions of the same requests must necessarily be superstitious; for our Lord himself, thrice within the space of one hour,

retired

retired for prayer, and poured out his soul in the very same words^e: but we must be understood to say, that the acceptableness of our prayers does not depend on the length of them. God does not need to be informed, or to be persuaded, by us: he is *omniscient*, and “knows what we need, before we ask him;” and he is *all-merciful*, and is infinitely more ready to give than we are to ask. We mistake the nature of prayer altogether, if we think that God is prevailed upon by it to do what he was otherwise averse to do. It is true, he requires us to be importunate^f: but these are not to be strained beyond their proper import: the use of prayer is, to affect our own souls with a deep sense of our guilt and misery; to acknowledge our entire dependence upon God; to raise our expectations from him; and to prepare our hearts for a grateful reception of his blessings; that, when he has answered our petitions, we may give him the glory due unto his name. It is a truth not generally known, that the very disposition to pray is a gift from God; and that God does not give *because* we pray, but stirs us up to pray, because he has before determined to give: and this truth, well digested in the mind, will keep us equally from a *presumptuous neglect* of prayer, on the one hand, and from a *superstitious use* of it, on the other.]

In addition to the foregoing cautions, we will suggest two or three others, arising out of a more minute attention to the text, which will serve as a further APPLICATION of the subject.

‘Guard them,

1. Against neglect of prayer—

[Our Lord does not here directly enjoin prayer as a duty, but he *takes for granted* that all his followers will pray. On any other supposition than this, his directions would lose all their force. In a subsequent part of this sermon he both enjoins it as a duty, and suspends on the performance of it all hopes of obtaining blessings from God. In truth, it is not possible for a Child of God to neglect prayer. Prayer is the very breath of a regenerate soul: and “as the body without the spirit is dead,” so the soul, without those spiritual affections which go forth to God in prayer, is dead also. As soon as ever Saul was converted to God, the testimony of God respecting him was, “Behold, he prayeth^g.” Those who neglect prayer, are decidedly

ranked

^e Matt. xxvi. 44.

^f Luke xi. 8—10. & xviii. 7, 8.

^g Acts ix. 11.

ranked among the workers of iniquity^h, on whom God will pour out his everlasting vengeanceⁱ. Think then, Beloved, how many there are amongst us, who have reason to tremble for their state! O that every prayerless person would lay this thought to heart! — — —]

2. Against formality in prayer—

[Prayer is a service of the *heart*, and not merely of the lip and knee. It is a “pouring out of the soul before God,” and “a stirring up of ourselves to lay hold on God.” Let none then deceive themselves with mere formal services, whether public or private. As to the circumstance of using a preconceived form of words, *that* makes no difference either way: a person may pray *spiritually with a form*, or *formally without one*. The true point to be ascertained, is, Do the feelings and desires of our souls correspond with the expressions of our lips? If they do, *that* is acceptable prayer; if not, it is altogether worthless in the sight of God. In the foregoing address, we have warned *the infidel and profane*; in this we would warn *the superstitious and hypocritical*. Yes: we must testify against them, that God looketh at *the heart*; and that they never will find acceptance with him, till they come to “worship him in spirit and in truth” — — —]

3. Against unbelief in prayer—

[It is our duty not only to pray, but to pray in faith. We are to draw nigh to God as “a Father,” and as “our” Father. It is our privilege to “have access to him with boldness and with confidence by faith in the Lord Jesus.” We “should lift up holy hands to him, without doubting.” We are told that “if we waver in our minds, we must not expect to receive any thing at his hands^k.” Let us then come to him with enlarged hearts: let us “open our mouths wide, that he may fill them.” Let us *ask*, whatever we feel that we stand in need of: and, when we have asked, all that we are able to express, let us *think* what unsearchable gifts he has further to bestow: and when we have exhausted our store of words and thoughts, let us remember that he is “able to give us exceeding abundantly above all that we can *ask* or *think*.” Petitions offered in such a frame as this, will never be unacceptable: such addresses will never be considered as “vain repetitions,” even though they were offered every hour in the day. Indeed, such a frame as this is intended by the Apostle, when he bids us to “pray without ceasing:” and such devotions will surely bring with them a rich reward: even in this world will God “reward them,

^h Ps. xiv. 4.

ⁱ Jer. x. 25.

^k Jam. i. 6, 7.

them, and “*openly*” too, by the manifestations of his love and the communications of his grace: and, in the world to come, he will say concerning us, as of Nathanael of old, “Behold an Israelite indeed,” a man of prayer: “I saw him under the fig-tree,” and in other places whither he retired for prayer; and I now, in the presence of the assembled universe, bear testimony to him as a faithful servant, that shall inherit the kingdom, and possess the glory which I have prepared for him.]

DCLXXXV.

HALLOWING GOD'S NAME.

Matt. vi. 9. *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name.*

IT is of the utmost importance to every human Being to know how he shall approach his God with acceptance. Hence some even of the Heathen philosophers endeavoured to instruct their disciples how to pray^a. We do not find indeed any form of prayer provided for the Jews, with the exception of some short passages which may be regarded in that light^b. But in the New Testament we are informed that John the Baptist gave special instructions to his disciples respecting prayer; and our blessed Lord composed a prayer which should be used by his followers, and should serve also as a pattern for prayer to his Church in all ages^c. If it be thought that it was intended only for his Disciples in their infantine state, previous to the outpouring of the Spirit upon them, let it be remembered, that it was recorded by the Evangelists a great many years after the full establishment of Christianity, without any hint of its use having been superseded: and consequently, we have the same reason to use it as the form and pattern of our supplications, as the Apostles themselves

^a Plato, in his Dialogue on Prayer, represents Socrates as teaching Alcibiades how to pray.

^b Numb. vi. 22—26. & x. 35, 36. & Hos. xiv. 2, 3.

^c Compare the text with Luke xi. 2.

themselves had: the only difference is, that as our Lord more clearly taught them afterwards to offer their petitions in his name, we must avail ourselves of that further information, to render our prayers more acceptable to God.

It being our intention to enter at large into the consideration of this prayer, we shall confine ourselves at present to that portion of it which we have read: in which are two things to be noticed;

I. The invocation—

It is to God alone, and not to creatures, whether angels or men, that we are to address our prayers: “God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another.” But to him we are invited to draw nigh; and are taught to regard him,

1. As a loving Father—

[Under this title God was known to his people of old. Indeed it was the appellation, which, in their eyes, was the surest pledge of his love^d: the appellation too in which he himself appeared peculiarly to delight^e. And well may it be a comfort to us to be permitted to address him by this endearing name: for, if he be a Father, he will pity our weakness^f, and pardon our sins^g, and supply our every want^h. True, if we have no nearer connexion with him than the ungodly world, and are his children only by creation, we can derive comparatively but little comfort from it, because we are in rebellion against him: but if we be his children by adoption and grace, what may we not expect at his hands? When we come to him as members of that great family, pleading for ourselves individually, and for the whole collectively; and addressing him in the name of all, as “our Father,” methinks he cannot turn away his ear from us: “We may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us.” Only let us come with “a spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father;” and, however “wide we may open our mouths, he will fill them.”]

2. As an almighty Friend—

[When we are taught to address God as our Father “which is in heaven,” we are not to understand it as distinguishing him from our earthly parents, but as intended to impress our minds with a sense of his majesty: to remind

us,

^d Isai. lxiii. 16.

^e Jer. iii. 4, 19.

^f Ps. ciii. 13.

^g Luke xv. 20.

^h Luke xi. 11—13.

us, that he sees every thing which passes upon earth, and that he has all power to relieve us, to the utmost extent of our necessities. The consideration that he is *our Father*, encourages us to come "with boldness and with confidence;" but the thought that he is that "high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," and dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; the thought that he knows even the most secret motions of our hearts, and is alike able to save or to destroy; these considerations, I say, are calculated to beget a holy fear in our minds, and to temper our boldness with reverential awe.

Such are the feelings which should be blended in our hearts, whenever we draw nigh to a throne of Grace. We should go to God as our Father; but, remembering that "he is in heaven and we upon earth, we should address him in words select and fewⁱ."]]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The address—

In this prayer there are six different petitions; three for the advancement of God's honour, and three for the promotion of our happiness. The former having the precedence, may fitly teach us, that a regard for God's honour ought to be first in our intention and desire. Yet it may well be doubted whether the address which is presented to God in our text, is a *petition*, or a *thankful acknowledgment*. Perhaps, in so concise a form as this, *both* may be properly included. Agreeably to this idea we shall consider the address,

1. As eucharistic—

[Though not generally regarded in this light, it seems naturally enough to bear this construction, inasmuch as it accords exactly with the feelings of a devout soul, when impressed and animated with a sense of God's paternal love. Suppose a person to have been meditating on the perfections of his God, the stupendous display of his love and mercy in Christ Jesus, his covenant engagements to his believing people, and the innumerable benefits conferred upon them; suppose him also to be warmed with the thought that this God is *his* God, his *Father*, and "his *eternal great reward*;" what would be the *first* effusions of his soul? Would he not burst forth into praises and adorations,

ⁱ Eccl. v. 2.

adorations, and even labour for words whereby to express his love and gratitude towards him? Thus it was with David on many occasions^k; and thus it will be with all who truly delight themselves in God. Sometimes, no doubt, the Believer's mind will be led to dwell rather on other subjects, whether of confession or petition, as circumstances may require: but where nothing extraordinary has occurred to distract his attention, sure I am that the language of adoration is most expressive of his feelings, and most suited to his state.]

2. As supplicatory—

[The Christian will not be satisfied with his own personal endeavours to honour God, but will wish and pray that the whole universe may render him the honour due unto his name. Hence he will beg of God to banish from the world all ignorance and error; and so to reveal himself to mankind, that all may be constrained to shew forth his praise——— This, I say, is nigh unto the heart of the Believer: he will long to promote it to the utmost of his power^l: he will pant after it, as an object of his most anxious desires^m; and he would be glad if every creature, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, could unite in this as their one blest employⁿ.]

Hence we may LEARN,

1. How glorious is the liberty of God's praying people—

[They are rescued from the dominion of *slavish fears* and *selfish desires*. "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord!" Inexpressibly happy are all whose hearts accord with the language of our text! Methinks they resemble, as nearly as such imperfect creatures can, the inhabitants of the realms of light. The cherubim around the throne veil their faces and their feet, in token of that reverential awe which they feel in the presence of the Deity: and the glorified saints cast down their crowns before the footstool of their Lord, to express their sense of their unworthiness of the mercies vouchsafed unto them; whilst the whole united choir vie with each other in hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb. Thus it is with the saints on earth, both in their secret chambers and in the House of God: they are filled with adoring thoughts of God their Saviour, and "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified." Doubtless they experience changes in their frames,

^k Ps. ix. 1, 2. & ciii. 1—5.

^m Ps. lxvii. 2—5.

^l Ps. lvii. 7—11.

ⁿ Ps. cxlviii. 1—11.

frames, and seem at times almost to have forgotten their high privileges: but in their better seasons they shew forth the power of divine grace, and enjoy an antepast of heaven. O that all of us might know their blessedness, by sweet experience!]

2. What losers are they who neglect prayer—

[The generality of people account prayer a drudgery: but they are bitter enemies to their own souls. What loss do they suffer in having God for an enemy, when they might have him for their Friend and Father! As for God, *he* suffers no loss: if they refuse to glorify him willingly, he will glorify himself upon them against their will. Reflect then, Brethren, what sufferers you are whilst you are turning your back on God! You have no Father to go to in the time of trouble; no sweet assurance that almighty wisdom and power are exercised for your support; no anticipations of the blessedness of heaven. On the contrary, all your enjoyments are empty, all your prospects dark. In this world you have little happiness above the beasts; and in the world to come, an eternity of unavailing sorrows. O that you would now begin to pray! O that God might say of you this day, as he did of Saul immediately after his conversion, “Behold he prayeth!” Then, however desperate your case may now appear, you should soon be received into the family of your God, and be partakers of his inheritance for evermore.]

DCLXXXVI.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 10. *Thy kingdom come: thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.*

HIGHLY as the Lord's Prayer is esteemed amongst us, and frequently as it is used, there is scarcely any part of Scripture less considered: we are contented with repeating the words, without ever attending to its true import. The fact is, that though it is written for the use of all, none can use it aright but the true Christian: it is the Christian only, whose heart can embrace the subjects contained in it.

The first petition which we are taught to offer,
is,

is, that God's "name may be hallowed" and adored. The two next petitions (which now come under our consideration) are intimately connected with it; they have^a respect to,

I. The universal establishment of his kingdom—

The kingdom, for the establishment of which we pray, is that of the Messiah—

[The dominion which God exercises by his providence, cannot be more universal than it is: "his kingdom ruleth over all." But the government which he maintains over the souls of men has in every age been extremely limited and partial. *That* is the kingdom which God has determined to erect: of *that* the Prophets have distinctly prophesied^a, and declared that it should be subjected to "Messiah the Prince^b:" its extent is to be universal^c, and its duration to the end of time^d.

The time was now at hand when the foundations of this kingdom were to be laid: and there was a general expectation, both among the godly^e and the ungodly^f, that measures for its establishment would speedily be adopted. True it is, that few, if any, sufficiently advert to the *spiritual nature* of this kingdom: but our Lord gradually rectified the apprehensions of his followers respecting it: and taught them to expect the long wished for period; and to pray that nothing might be able to retard its arrival. Some have thought, that, since the establishment of Christianity in the world, there is no further occasion for this petition: but there is, in fact, the same occasion for it now as there was at the first moment it was suggested to the disciples: the only difference between their use of it and ours is, that *they* prayed for the commencement of this kingdom, and *we* for its progressive and final establishment. Indeed, the kingdom itself will never have attained its utmost bounds, till every enemy of it be put under the Messiah's feet, and every subject of it be perfected in glory.]

Nor can this event have too prominent a place in our prayers—

[After the general petition that God's name may be glorified, we are taught immediately to desire the advent of the Messiah's kingdom. Nor is this without reason: for it is by the establishment of this kingdom, and by that alone,

^a Dan. ii. 44.

^b Dan. vii. 13, 14.

^c ib.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25.

^e Luke ii. 38. & Mark xv. 43.

^f Luke xvii. 20, 21.

alone, that God's name can ever be sanctified in the earth. Look at the Heathen world, who are worshipping devils, or bowing down to stocks and stones: what glory has the Lord from them? Look at those who are carried away by the Mahometan delusion, or hardened by Jewish infidelity: these profess indeed to acknowledge the one true God; but they cast his word behind them, and are avowed enemies to his only-begotten Son. Look at the Christian world, by whom he is dishonoured no less than by any of those whom we have before mentioned: with the exception of a little remnant whom he has renewed by his grace, there is not one on earth that truly loves him, or cordially adores him: all have some idol in their hearts which they prefer to him, some darling lust which they will not sacrifice for his sake. Here surely is abundant reason why we should entreat him to put forth his almighty power for the conversion of the world.

Let this petition then be offered by us with constancy, and with an earnestness, proportioned to its importance. Let us pray that "the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified amongst us:" that he would "gird his sword upon his thigh, and ride on in the cause of meekness and truth and righteousness;" till "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ."

God requires this at our hands; nay more, the creation itself demands it of us. "The whole creation are represented as groaning and travailing in pain together" in expectation of this event^s; and therefore may well be considered as calling on us to exert ourselves in every possible way for their complete deliverance. Whenever then we contemplate the state of those around us, or extend our views to the Heathen world, let us lift up our hearts to God, and pray, "Thy kingdom come."]

Closely connected with this petition is that which next occurs, for,

II. The unlimited execution of his will—

This will flow from the former, as an effect inseparable from it. We cannot approve ourselves subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom in any other way than by our obedience to his will. Hence we are taught to pray, that God's will may be done

^s Rom. viii. 21—23.

done by ourselves and all mankind, even as it is done in heaven: and *that* too,

1. In a way of cheerful acquiescence—

[The angels, notwithstanding they dwell immediately in the presence of their God, and behold “the works which he doeth for the children of men,” are yet not privy to his ultimate designs; nor do they understand the full scope of all that they behold. As, under the Mosaic dispensation, the cherubim upon the mercy-seat were formed in a bending posture, looking down upon the ark, in order, as it were, to search out the mysteries contained in it, so are the angels represented by St. Peter as “desiring to look into” the Gospel salvation^a; and St. Paul says, that the revelation which God has with progressive clearness made of himself unto the Church, is no less instructive to *them* than to usⁱ. But we are well assured that they never for a moment doubt either the wisdom or goodness of God in any of his dispensations^k. In this they are a fit pattern for our imitation. We know not the secret purposes of God in any thing that he does: his ways are in the great deep, and his footsteps are not known. But we should be satisfied in our minds, that “he does, and will do, all things well;” and that, though “clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne.” However mysterious his ways may appear, we should at all times solace ourselves with this, that “what we know not now, we shall know hereafter.” Were this spirit universally prevalent, discontent would be utterly banished from the world. Under the most afflictive dispensations we should maintain a humble composure and a thankful frame^l. What a desirable state! how honourable to God! and what a source of happiness to man!]

2. In a way of active obedience—

[Here also are the angels a pattern for us: they are “ministers of God, to do his pleasure; and they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word^m.” The very first intimation of the Divine will is quite sufficient for them. Whatever the office be, whether to deliver Lot from Sodom, or to destroy 185,000 Assyrians, they execute it with equal readiness and equal pleasure. Thus should

we

^a 1 Pet. i. 12.

ⁱ Eph. iii. 10.

^k Rev. xvi. 5—7. & xix. 1—4.

^l Isai. xxxix. 8. 1 Sam. iii. 18. 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.

^m Ps. ciii. 20, 21.

we engage in the service of our God: it should be "our meat and our drink to do his will;" we should hearken diligently to his word, in order to learn what we have to do; and then we should do it without hesitation, without weariness, without reserve. Nor should we be satisfied with having our own souls brought into this state; we should long to see every sinner upon earth, and "every thought of his heart, captivated in like manner to the obedience of Christ." The Apostle's prayer should be the language both of our hearts and lipsⁿ.

But who can effect this change? Who can subdue the unruly wills and affections of sinful men? None but God: he must "make them willing in the day of his power," or "they will continue in their rebellion even to the end. To him therefore we should look; and to him should we make our supplication, that he would "reveal his arm," and subdue the nations to the obedience of faith.]

From this directory for prayer, we cannot but
OBSERVE,

1. What elevation of mind religion inspires—

[Statesmen and philosophers, however enlarged their minds, are occupied solely about the things of time and sense: whereas the Christian, even though he be poor and illiterate, "separates himself" for the pursuit of higher objects, and "seeketh and intermeddleth with heavenly wisdom." *The universal establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, and the unlimited execution of the Divine will, the bringing down of heaven to earth, and the assimilating of earth to heaven, these are the subjects of his daily meditation: these are the objects of his most ardent desire. The men of science justly value themselves on having enjoyed the blessings of education: they know and feel the benefit of having their thoughts raised to the contemplation of objects that are out of the reach of vulgar and illiterate minds. But the Christian surpasses them incomparably more than they surpass the lowest of mankind: his meditations are more noble; his mind is more enlarged. Let us learn then to form a proper estimate of religion; and to regard it with the veneration it deserves.]*

2. What happiness it is calculated to produce—

[Let these petitions be answered; let this state of things prevail; let the Messiah reign in the hearts of all mankind; let the example of angels be emulated by every human Being. Will any one say, that *this* would *lessen* the happiness of the

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

^o Prov. xviii. 1.

the world? Will any one say that he even feels a doubt upon the subject? No: we are all convinced in our consciences, that in proportion as we approximated to the holiness of angels, we should also participate their bliss. See what it is that occasions, by far the greater part of misery in the world: "Whence spring wars and fightings amongst us, but from the lusts which war in our members?" It is to the same source that we must trace the greater part of our bodily disorders and our mental troubles. Sin is the parent of misery in ten thousand different forms: and it is religion alone that can heal the wounds which sin has made. If any who profess religion are not happy, the fault is not in religion, but in them: they have either erroneous notions of God's kingdom, or a partial regard for his will. Let them only possess the dispositions implied in these prayers, and they will have a very heaven upon earth ^p.]

^p See Isai. lx. 19, 20.

DCLXXXVII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 11. *Give us this day our daily bread.*

IN those petitions which relate to the glory of God, that occurs first which is the most comprehensive and the most important: in these which relate to the welfare of man, a different order is observed. The comfortable support of our bodies, instead of being of chief importance, is, when compared with spiritual blessings, quite insignificant. Yet is a petition respecting that with great propriety placed first; because, unless our bodies be preserved in life, there will be no further scope for the communication of grace on God's part, or the exercise of it on ours. The subject of this petition indeed is such, as many would think scarcely worthy of a place in so short a summary of prayer as that before us: but our Lord did not account it so; and therefore we should not.

That

That we may form a right judgment concerning it, let us consider,

I. The import of this petition—

There are two things in it which call for explanation:

1. The general scope of it—

[Some have thought, that, because Christ is represented as “the bread of life” which every one must eat, we are here taught to pray for the knowledge and enjoyment of HIM: whilst others have thought, that the prayer referred to the sacramental bread, which in the primitive Church was partaken of daily by the whole body of Believers. But neither of these interpretations accords with the terms in which the petition is conveyed. The plain and literal sense of the words seems to be that which was intended by our Lord. It may be thought strange indeed, that, when three petitions only are suggested for the welfare of man, one of them should be confined to his bodily concerns. But it must be remembered, that those are the concerns in which we are most apt to overlook the interpositions of Heaven; and consequently, that we particularly needed to have this very direction given us. Nor is it a small matter to acknowledge the agency of God in things of such apparently inferior moment: for it leads us to realize the thought of an overruling Providence in every thing, even in the death of a sparrow, or the falling of a hair of our head.]

2. The particular limitations contained in it—

[*The thing which we pray for*, is limited to the *necessaries* of life. This is the general acceptation of the term “bread” in Scripture: it comprehends all the things which are needful for the body, but not any luxuries or superfluities. Doubtless those necessaries will vary according to our rank and situation in life, and according to the numbers we have dependent on us for support: and what would be a superfluity under some circumstances, would be no more than absolutely necessary under other circumstances: but, due respect being had to these things, this must be the limit of our requests. If we ask for any thing, “to consume it upon our lusts, we ask amiss.”

The measure also of these necessaries is limited. We are not to ask for a store on which we may subsist for a time independent of God; but simply for such things as
are

are requisite for our *present subsistence*. The term that is used in our text^b is indeed variously interpreted: but, when compared with the corresponding passage in St. Luke^c, its meaning will evidently appear to be that which our translators have affixed to it: we pray from day to day, that God will give us what is necessary for the day. We are not even to "take thought for the morrow;" at least, not so as to feel any anxious care respecting it^d: for we know not that we shall be alive on the morrow; or, if we be spared, we know that He who provided for us yesterday and to-day, can do the same to-morrow: on Him therefore we should "cast our care, believing that he careth for us," and that he *will* provide whatever in his wisdom he shall see good for us. In every place, in every event, in every thing, we should see, as it were, that name inscribed, "*Jehovah-jireh*," The Lord will provide^e.]

Now this petition will be found extremely important, if we consider,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

We need not put any forced interpretation on our text in order to render it instructive; for it teaches us many practical lessons that are of great importance:

1. That we should be moderate in our desires of earthly things—

[Our hearts are naturally set on earthly things. Our Lord tells us, that the Gentiles think of little except what they shall eat and drink and wear^f. And it is precisely thus with the great mass of those who bear the Christian name. The Heathen themselves do not exceed us in an eager pursuit after the good things of this life. Nor is perfect contentment known even among those who possess the largest fortunes: there is always something beyond their present attainments, which they are aspiring after, and anxious to possess. But it should not, nor indeed can it, be thus with any true Christian. The man who sees the worth and excellence of heavenly things can no longer pant after the worthless things of time and sense: he is like a man, who, having looked at the sun, sees a dark spot upon every earthly object. From that moment, Agur's wish is his^g: in his addresses to his heavenly Father, he can

^b ἐπιβίον.

^c Luke xi. 3. τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν.

^d ver. 34.

^e Gen. xxii. 8, 14.

^f ver. 32.

^g Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

can ask for nothing more than food and raiment^h: possessing that, he is contentⁱ: or even if he do not possess it, he “knows how to suffer need as well as to abound^k,” and, when “having nothing, feels that he possesses all things^l.”

Let this lesson then be learned by us: and let every one of us apply to himself that solemn caution, “Seekest thou great things unto thyself? Seek them not^m.”]

2. That we should depend on God's providence for the supply of them—

[God is the true source of temporal, no less than of spiritual blessings. It is he who causeth the earth to bring forthⁿ, and instructs men how to cultivate it to advantage^o: and, without his blessing, all our labours would terminate in disappointment^p. The whole creation subsists upon his kind and bounteous provision^q. Now because we have so long been habituated to receive the productions of the earth, either spontaneously presenting themselves to us, or rewarding the labours of our hands, we are very apt to overlook the Donor, and to forget our dependence upon God. But we are in fact as dependent on him as “the fowls of the air, which neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns:” and we should *in the habit of our minds* live upon his providence, precisely as the Israelites did in the wilderness; and receive “our daily bread” at his hands, as much as if it were daily given to us from the clouds. We are indeed to labour for the things which are necessary for the body, as well as for those which pertain to the soul. The prohibition which our Lord gave respecting this, is not absolute, but only comparative^r. If we will not labour for ourselves, we have no claim for assistance either from God or man^s. Nevertheless, when we have laboured with ever so much skill and diligence, we must bear in mind, that “our daily bread is as truly the *gift*” of God, as if we had not laboured for it at all: and our hope for the future must be in him alone, as much as if we were, like Elijah, subsisting daily on provision brought to us by ravens:]

3. That, whatever be the portion which God sees fit to give us, we should be therewith content—

[A person who should form his judgment by outward appearances, would think that there is an exceeding great difference

^h Gen. xxviii. 20.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^o Deut. viii. 17, 18.

^r John vi. 27.

^j 1 Tim. vi. 8.

^m Jer. xlv. 5.

^p Hagg. i. 6.

^q 2 Thess. iii. 12.

^k Phil. iv. 11, 12.

ⁿ Ps. civ. 14, 15.

^q Ps. civ. 27, 28.

difference between the comforts of the rich and of the poor. But there is really far less difference than we are apt to imagine. The richest man has no security for his possessions: experience proves, that kings may be hurled from their thrones, and nobles be reduced to subsist on charity. Moreover, whilst men possess their wealth, they may, by disease of body or perturbation of mind, be deprived of all comfort, and be made to envy the poorest man who is in the enjoyment of health and peace. But the pious poor have necessities secured to them on the most inviolable of all tenures, the promise of a faithful God^t. Besides, the rich have very little conception of the happiness that is derived from seeing the hand of God in their daily provision. This happiness is reserved for the poor. *They* are constrained to feel their dependence on God: and, when they receive their supplies, they often behold such peculiar circumstances attending them, as mark in the strongest manner the interposition of the Deity in their behalf. Can any one doubt whether provision sent in such a way be enjoyed with a greater zest than that which is supplied out of our own store? Surely the thoughts which arise in the mind of a poor man on such occasions, which fill his eyes with tears of gratitude, and his mouth with songs of praise, are an infinitely richer feast than all the luxuries which even royal wealth could procure. Let not any then be discontented with their lot: "the rich and the poor meet together" far more nearly than is generally supposed^u: "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesseth," but in the blessing which he enjoys along with it: "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich; and he addeth no sorrow with it^v." Our blessed Lord, who often wanted bread to eat, and "a place where to lay his head," has sanctified a state of want, and shewn that the Father's love is not to be judged of by his external dispensations, nor that his children's happiness is not materially affected by them. Are any of you then under circumstances of trial? Be of good cheer: it is a small matter for your bodies to be in want, provided "your souls be satisfied with the plenteousness of your Father's house." Only "eat abundantly" of "the living bread," "which is meat indeed;" and then the scantiest pittance that you can subsist upon shall be sweet as honey or the honeycomb. Feed richly, I say, on *that*; and "you shall never hunger," as long as the world shall stand^v. As it respects your body, "your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure;" and,

^t Matt. vi. 33. Ps. xxxiv. 10.^u Prov. xxii. 2.^x Prov. x. 22.^v John vi. 35, 55.

and, as it respects your soul, you shall evermore “delight yourself in fatness.”]

[Isaï. xxxiii. 16. & lv. 2.

DCLXXXVIII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 12. *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

THE petitions of men to the Supreme Being will be presented in a different order, according to the general state of their minds, or according to the particular circumstances in which they are placed. A person just awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger, would most probably assign the first place in his petitions to that which, at such a season, would press most forcibly upon his mind—the obtaining of reconciliation with an offended God. But when he has obtained peace with God, and is enabled to come to him as a child unto his father; his slavish fear gives way to an ingenuous concern for his father's honour, and his own personal safety occupies a less prominent situation in his prayers. Not that he is less interested in the welfare of his soul than before; but he is more interested in other concerns, which, at the first, had no place in his thoughts. Accordingly we find, in that form of prayer which our Lord himself has prescribed as the most perfect, this order is observed. The devout soul is first led to express its concern for the universal establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom; and then, after one petition for the preservation of its existence in the body, it is taught to implore the pardon of all its multiplied transgressions. This is the portion of that prayer which we are at this time to consider: and in it we shall notice,

I. The petition itself—

To

To pray for the forgiveness of our sins is,

1. Universally necessary—

[Sins are here spoken of under the notion of debts: for as by the preceptive part of the law we are bound to obedience, so by the sanctions of the law there is laid upon us an obligation to suffer punishment in case of disobedience. Our sins therefore are debts which we owe to Divine justice for our violations of the laws of God. And who is there among the children of men that has not many debts to be forgiven? That there is a great difference between different persons in respect to the guilt they have contracted, we readily acknowledge; but “there is no man that liveth and sinneth not:” “in many things we all offend:” “if any say that they have not sinned, they make God a liar, and his word is not in them:” for his testimony respecting the whole race of mankind is, that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;” and, consequently, that “every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before him.”

What then must be done? Can any one discharge his own debt? If any will attempt it, what method will he pursue? If he will obey the law in future, that will no more satisfy its demands for past disobedience than the ceasing to increase a debt will discharge a debt that is already contracted. If he will endeavour to atone for his sins by tears of penitence, rivers of tears will never suffice to wash away one sin. There is but one possible remedy remaining for him; and that is, to cast himself upon the mercy of God, and to implore forgiveness for the Redeemer's sake. *In this respect* all are upon a level: whether our sins have been greater or less, this is the only way in which we can return to God with any hope of acceptance. The proud self-justifying Pharisee will be dismissed with abhorrence; and those only who come in the spirit of the self-abasing publican will obtain mercy at his hands.

There are two sorts of persons indeed, who are apt to indulge very erroneous conceptions on this subject: some suppose that they are so *completely justified* as not to need any renewed *applications* for pardon; and others, that they are so *perfectly sanctified* as not to have any fresh *occasion* for pardon. But as David, after God by Nathan had sealed his pardon, still implored mercy at the hands of God^a, so must we: and they who fancy themselves living in a sinless state, are proud deceivers of their own souls^b. There is not

^a Compare 2 Sam. xii. 13. with Ps. li.

^b 1 John i. 8. Jam. iii. 2.

not a day or an hour in which any human Being has not just occasion to offer the petition in our text : the corruption of his nature, the transgressions of his former life, and the imperfections of his very best services, all require it of him^c.]

2. Infinitely important—

[Consider the state of a man whose iniquities are not forgiven: God, the Almighty God, is his enemy^d ——— He is every moment in danger of dropping into hell^e ——— He neither has, nor can have, any solid peace in his mind^f ——— He lives but to aggravate his guilt, and augment his condemnation^g ——— Can any one reflect on this, and not see the importance of urging the petition in our text? The only wonder is, that any person in an unforgiven state can close his eyes in sleep, or give attention to any of the concerns of time or sense, till he has implored mercy at the hands of his offended God.]

But whilst the general importance of this petition is obvious, there certainly is some obscurity in,

II. The limitation or condition annexed to it—

To understand this part of the Lord's Prayer aright, we must compare the expressions as recorded by St. Luke, with those which are used in the text. St. Luke says, "Forgive us, *for* we forgive others^h:" but in the text we pray, "Forgive us, *as* we forgive others." Now we cannot doubt but that both the Evangelists have given the prayer with accuracy, so far at least as not to comprehend in it any thing which was not intended by our Lord. We, therefore, shall take the petition in both views, and consider it as importing,

1. A profession of our readiness to forgive others—

[This is a frame of mind which God requires in all who come to him for mercy: and he warns us not to expect mercy at his hands whilst we are indisposed to exercise it towards othersⁱ. Such is the explanation which our Lord himself

^c See John xiii. 10. As they who have walked in a bath yet need to wash their feet on account of the defilement contracted in coming from it, so, &c.

^d Ps. vii. 11—13.

^e Luke xii. 20.

^f Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

^g Rom. ii. 5.

^h Luke x. 14.

ⁱ Jam. ii. '

himself gives of his own words^k: and, taken in this sense, they are a kind of plea with God to grant us our desire, and an encouragement to ourselves to expect it. The duty of forgiving others being imposed upon us as a condition, without the performance of which God will not forgive us, a consciousness of having performed the duty emboldens us to ask forgiveness at his hands. Moreover, whilst we thus appeal to God respecting our endeavours to obey his commandments, we do in effect acknowledge the agency of his Spirit, and the efficacy of his grace; without which we should have neither the ability nor inclination to fulfil his will^l. In this view then it is also encouraging; for, if God has already bestowed his grace upon us, and we have a clear evidence of it by its operation on our hearts and lives, we may reasonably hope, that he will yet further extend his mercy to us in the pardon of all our sins: we may regard his past favours as a pledge and earnest of others yet to come, and especially of those which our souls most need, and which he himself is most ready to bestow.]

2. A consent that the mercy we shew to others should be made the pattern of God's mercy to us—

[We cannot with propriety request, that the forgiveness which we exercise towards others may be the *measure* of that which we would receive from God; (because every thing we do is so extremely imperfect :) but the *pattern* it may and ought to be. Of course, as in the former case, when we speak of a *condition*, we are not to be understood as if there were any thing *meritorious* in forgiving others, or as if God bargained with us, as it were, and bartered away his mercies; so, in the present case, we are not to be understood as if there were, or could be, any thing in us that was worthy of God's imitation. There is a sense in which we are to be "pure, as God is pure," and "perfect, as he is perfect;" and, in a similar sense, though not with equal strictness, we may beg of God to forgive us our offences, as we forgive our offending fellow-creatures; that is, freely, fully, cordially, and for ever.

True it is that, in offering this petition, we need to speak "with fear and trembling;" lest there be in our hearts any root of bitterness unperceived by us, and lest, when praying for forgiveness, we do in effect pray, that we *not* be forgiven. And, that no doubt may exist respecting our sincerity in forgiving others, we ought to be rendering good for evil, and "heaping thereby coals of fire on the heads" of our enemies, to melt them into love. Then may we

^k ver. 14, 15.

^l Phil. ii. 13.

we use this petition with safety, with confidence, and with comfort.]

From this view of our subject, we LEARN,

1. The temper of a Christian—

[Knowing that his own debt to God is ten thousand talents, and that his fellow-creature can at the utmost owe to him only a few pence, the Christian dares not take him by the throat unmercifully, lest God should retaliate on *him*, and require at *his* hands the debt, which the whole universe could never pay. Freely has he received remission; and freely does he grant it, even to those who may have injured him in the highest degree. All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, are put away from him, with all malice: and he is kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving towards others, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven him^m.

Let us examine then whether this be indeed *our* character: let us search whether our mode of speaking of others; and of acting towards them, accord with it: for, if we bring our gift to the altar with an unforgiving spirit, God bids us to "go our way," and not presume to expect any tokens of his favour, till the most perfect reconciliation has been sought with our offending or offended brotherⁿ.]

2. The privilege of a Christian—

[Here God permits, encourages, commands us to ask of him the free and full pardon of all our sins. No consideration whatever is had to the number or greatness of them: the command is given to every human Being; and the fullest possible assurance, that none shall ask in vain^o.

Some however have thought, that, because no mention is here made of Christ and his atonement, we need not to have respect to *him* in our addresses at the throne of grace. But we must remember, that our Lord had not yet declared the whole of what he was come to reveal. This sermon was delivered quite at the commencement of his ministry, and before the minds of his followers were sufficiently prepared for the clearer manifestation of Divine truth. What therefore he afterwards declared respecting the intent of his death and resurrection, must direct us in our use of this prayer. He has told us, that he "shed his blood for the remission of sins;" and that we must present our petitions to God in *his* name; consequently,
we

^m Eph. iv. 31, 32. ⁿ Matt. v. 23, 24. and especially xviii. 35.

^o Matt. vii. 7, 8. Isai. i. 18.

we must have respect to the merit of his blood, and to the efficacy of his intercession, whenever we approach our God, whether in the use of this prayer, or of any other, which we may think suited to our state. If the consideration of an atonement seem to detract from the *freeness* of the pardon, St. Paul saw no ground whatever for such an objection ^p.

Be it known then to all, that a way of access unto the Father is opened to us through the crucifixion of the Son of God; and that, if only we ask forgiveness in the Redeemer's name, our iniquities, whatever they may have been, shall be "blotted out as a morning cloud," and be irrecoverably "cast into the depths of the sea."]

^p Rom. iii. 24.

DCLXXXIX.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 13. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

THE obtaining of pardon would satisfy a person who was merely alarmed by the terrors of hell: but a truly regenerate person will desire deliverance from sin as much as from hell itself. He knows that he could not be happy even in heaven, if sin retained in any respect dominion over him. Hence, having implored pardon for his past sins, he will, with equal earnestness, desire victory over his remaining corruptions. But how is this victory to be gained, seeing that we are encompassed with temptations, and assaulted by all the powers of darkness? It must be gained by committing ourselves to the care of our heavenly Father, and by seeking from him,

I. The guidance of his providence—

Continually are we endangered by the temptations that surround us—

[Temptations present themselves to us on every side. Every thing that is agreeable to our senses or flattering
to

to our minds, has a tendency to draw us from God. Even the things which are the most innocent when moderately enjoyed, often become snares to us. Our food, our raiment, our comforts of every kind, and even our dearest relatives, are apt to engross our affections too much, and to become the objects of an idolatrous regard—— The cares and troubles of life also are frequently sources of unbelieving anxiety, or murmuring discontent—— Moreover, the contempt too generally poured upon religion has not unfrequently a fatal influence on our minds, to keep us from inquiring after God at all, or from confessing him openly before an ungodly world——

To these temptations incalculable force is given by the corruptions of our own hearts. We are of our own selves prone to evil. The heart is ready to catch fire from every spark; and all the appetites and passions are quickly brought into activity in the service of sin. In vain does reason remonstrate with us: “the law of sin that is in our members, wars against the law of our minds, and brings us unto captivity^a.” yea, even when the spiritual principle lusteth and striveth against the corruptions of the flesh, so strong is the corrupt principle within us, we cannot do the things that we would^b.]

Well therefore may we pray to be kept from their power—

[We are not to suppose that God is active in tempting us to sin: St. James expressly says that it is our own lust, and not God, that is the occasion of sin^c. But God may in his providence give scope for the exercise of our corruptions, as he did, when he raised up Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, and opened the Red Sea before him for the purpose of making him a more signal monument of his displeasure^d. On the other hand, he will often put an obstacle in the way of his people, so as to keep them from executing the evil suggestions of their hearts: he will plant a “hedge; and, if that will not suffice, he will build up a wall against them, that they may not find their former ways.” *This he can do* in ten thousand ways, without at all infringing upon the liberty of the human will. Thus he diverted the Patriarchs from destroying Joseph, and David from wreaking his vengeance upon Nabal^e.

Moreover, *he has promised to do this* in answer to our prayers. He will either make a way for us to escape from the temptations that assault us; or will moderate them,

so

^a Rom. vii. 23.

^b Gal. v. 17.

^c Jam. i. 13—15.

^d Rom. ix. 17.

^e Hos. ii. 6, 7.

^f 1 Sam. xxv. 32—34.

so that they may not be too powerful for us; or increase our strength, that we may be able to overcome them^g. In a word, he will "order our goings," and "direct our paths." If we were to depend on our own wisdom, we should only increase the difficulties which we designed to avoid^h: but if we make God our refuge, we shall be preserved. He has bidden us "watch and pray that we enter not into temptationⁱ;" and he will never suffer us to use these means in vain^k.]

But as we cannot hope to be kept from every temptation, we should also pray to God for,

II. The assistance of his grace—

Besides our in-dwelling corruptions, we have, in Satan, a great and powerful enemy—

[The words which are translated, "from evil," might properly be translated, "from the evil one." Satan is represented in Scripture as a most subtle and cruel adversary to man. He is called a serpent for his subtlety, a dragon for his fierceness, and a god for the dominion that he exercises over the children of men.

To withstand him in our own strength is impossible. He has wiles which we cannot discover, and devices which we cannot fathom. If permitted, he could soon destroy the holiest of men. None are out of his reach. He not only instigated a wicked Judas to betray his Master, and an hypocritical Ananias to lie unto his God, but an intrepid Peter to deny his Lord: and, if our Lord's intercession had not prevailed to secure the faith of this favoured servant, Satan would have "sifted him as wheat," and brought him to everlasting destruction^l.]

We should therefore pray to be delivered from him also—

[God will deliver us from him, as well as from temptation. He has provided armour for us, which, if used aright, shall defend us against all his fiery darts. The head, the breast, the legs, have their several and appropriate means of protection—— Every part also is doubly guarded by the shield of faith: and a sword of heavenly temper is put into the Believer's hands^m; a sword which Satan is not able to withstand; a sword by which the Saviour himself prevailed.

^g 1 Cor. x. 13. Isai. xli. 10. ^h Amos v. 9.

ⁱ Matt. xxvi. 41.

^k Ps. cxlii. 1—7. Ps. cxxxviii. 3. & l. 15.

^l Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^m Eph. vi. 11 17.

prevailed over himⁿ, and which, though in the weakest hands, shall vanquish all the powers of hell^o. Does any one ask, How shall I get this armour? We answer, Pray to God to give it you. It is by prayer that it is obtained; by prayer it is put on; by prayer we are rendered expert in the use of it; and by prayer our heart is steeled with courage, and our arm confirmed with strength^p. The petition that is taught us in the text will answer every end; and urged with frequency and faith, will soon make us more than conquerors. Would we see the whole exemplified? Behold the instance of St. Paul: in him, the assault, defence, and victory, are all exhibited before our eyes. Satan assaulted him with the utmost violence: the Apostle instantly betook himself to prayer; and his triumph was speedy and complete: and in like manner shall "God's strength be perfected in our weakness," if only we rely on him for our deliverance: were we a thousand times weaker than we are, his grace should assuredly be sufficient for us^q.]

The petition, thus explained, is of use,

1. For caution—

[When persons are urged to watch and pray, and to abstain from those things which are the occasions of sin, they are ready to complain that we are too strict, and that we abridge the liberties of men without necessity. But, what can be expected, if we will frequent every scene of vanity, and mix indiscriminately with all, whether godly or ungodly? What can be expected, but that we should drink into the spirit of the world, and be drawn into many sinful compliances? Does not every one find this to be the effect of associating with the world? Is not a conformity to its maxims and habits the almost necessary consequence of such conduct? Men, if on a field of battle, would not for their pleasure go and expose themselves where it was almost impossible to escape a wound; and yet, when their souls are in danger, they will venture any where for the sake of conforming to the world or of obtaining some worthless gratification. But how can such persons offer the prayer which our Lord has taught us? Is it not a mockery to beg of God "not to lead us into temptation," when we are rushing into it daily of our own accord? Know ye then, beloved, that your practice should correspond with your prayers. Know that to expose yourselves to sin is to tempt your God: yea, it is to tempt the devil

ⁿ Eph. vi. 17. with Matt. iv. 6, 7, 10.

^o Jam. iv. 7.

^p Eph. vi. 18.

^q 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

devil to tempt you. If you would be preserved by God, you must keep yourselves, not your feet merely, but your hearts also, and *that* with all diligence, avoiding not only sin itself, but also the means and occasions of sin.]

2. For encouragement—

[It may please God for wise and gracious ends to suffer you to be strongly tempted by the wicked one. Perhaps he may design to manifest and confirm the grace he has already given you^r; or to discover to you some hidden evil in your own heart^s: or he may design to keep you from falling into sin^t, or to make use of you for the strengthening of others by a contrasted exhibition of your own weakness and of his unbounded mercy in your recovery^u.—— But, whatever be his object, and however painful your trial may be, remember, that Satan is a vanquished enemy^x; that he cannot go beyond the limits which God has assigned him; and that your God is ever at hand to hear and answer your petitions. Were you called to contend in your own strength, your situation would be tremendous: but you are commanded to “cast your care on God, who careth for you,” and to “encourage yourselves in the Lord your God.” Be strong then, and fear not: “be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might:” and know that he who has taught you to look to him for guidance and protection, will “keep you from falling,” and “bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”]

^r Job i. 8.

^s 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

^t 2 Cor. xii. 7. Mark the first and last words.

^u Luke xxii. 32.

^x John xvi. 11. Col. ii. 15.

^y Jude, ver. 24.

^z Rom. xvi. 20.

DCXC.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 13. *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

ON a review of the Lord's Prayer, we cannot but be thankful that such a summary is given us, not only because we are hereby instructed what to pray for, but are assured that, great as the petitions are, they shall all be granted, if we offer them up in faith. The conclusion of the prayer

prayer which we have now read, is not contained in St. Luke's Gospel. But we must remember, that the prayer was given to the Disciples at two different times, and on different occasions: and that in the one it might be contained, though it might be omitted in the other. Doubts indeed have been suggested whether it originally formed any part of the prayer before us: but, whilst the Latin versions and fathers omit it, it is found in most of the Greek manuscripts, and is quoted by most of the Greek fathers: from whence the translators of our Bible have admitted it as a part of the sacred text; as we also may safely do on their authority. Certain it is that there is in these words a perfect correspondence with the prayer itself; and that they admirably express the feelings of a devout soul. This may be understood in a twofold view;

I. As a devout acknowledgment—

It is often called a doxology, or an ascription of praise to God: and in this view we may observe concerning it,

1. That it accords with many other passages of Holy Writ—

[Such effusions of praise are frequent in the holy Scriptures: indeed the very words appear to have been taken from that thanksgiving of David, which he uttered when both he and his people had been consecrating their offerings to the Lord for the building of his temple^a—— In the New Testament such doxologies abound. The Apostles frequently interrupt the thread of their argument, (if it can be called an interruption,) by breaking forth into rapturous expressions of praise and thanksgiving^b; and more frequently conclude their epistles with such tokens of grateful adoration^c. Sometimes also we find, that, after pouring out their souls before God in prayer, the Apostles address their thanksgivings to him, just in the way that we are taught to do in the prayer before us^d. The propriety

^a 1 Chron. xxix. 10—13. *Recite them.*

^b Gal. i. 5. 1 Tim. i. 17.

^c Rom. xvi. 27. 1 Pet. v. 11. Jude, ver. 24, 25.

^d Eph. iii. 14, 20, 21.

priety therefore of addressing God in this manner is evident, since it is sanctioned by the example of the saints in all ages.]

2. That it is well calculated for the use of the Christian Church—

[Every work of God, whether animate or inanimate, renders unto him a tribute of praise: the beauty and order of the whole creation, and the adaptation of every thing to its proper end, declares aloud the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of the Creator. But the people of God must be active in rendering praise to him; according to that distinction of the Psalmist, "All thy works *praise* thee, O God; and thy saints shall *bless* thee^e." The redeemed of the Lord are called upon to testify their obligations to him in this manner day and night^f: it is "comely" for them so to do^g, and, "if they should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out against them." And where shall we find words more proper for our use? They are so concise as to be easily remembered, and so comprehensive as to include every thing that we could wish to say. They are, in fact, an epitome of that song which saints and angels are singing in the realms above^h——— and, if we offer them in a becoming manner, we shall have an earnest and foretaste of the heavenly bliss.

Nor is there a small emphasis to be laid on the word with which the prayer concludes. "Amen," when annexed to praise and thanksgiving, denotes the full concurrence of the soul in all that has been uttered. In the fourth century, it was customary for the whole Church to utter this word aloud, in order to express their cordial assent to every thing that had been spoken; and at times, as St. Jerome tells us, the sound was like thunderⁱ. As far as respects their earnestness, we approve of their custom: but we think that true devotion would be less clamorous: and we far prefer that mode adopted by the Church in the days of Nehemiah, when the earnestness was equally, but more suitably, expressed; being chastened and tempered with ardent affection, and reverential awe^k———]

But we have observed that the words of our text may be also interpreted,

II. As a humble plea—

Pleading

^e Ps. cxlv. 10.

^f Ps. cvii. 1, 2. cxlv. 1, 2. & cxlvi. 1, 2.

^g Ps. cxlvii. 1.

^h Rev. v. 13.

ⁱ "In Ecclesiis urbis Romæ quasi tonitru cœleste audimus populum reboantem Amen." Præf. in Epist. ad Galat.

^k Neh. viii. 6.

Pleading with God is the very essence and perfection of prayer—

[In all the more solemn addresses to the Deity recorded in the Scriptures, pleading bears a very conspicuous part. We must not however imagine that such a mode of prayer was adopted with a view to prevail upon God to grant what he was otherwise averse to give: we mistake the nature of prayer altogether, if we think that it has any such power, or is to be used for any such end. Prayer is rather intended to impress our own minds with a sense of our manifold necessities, and of our dependence upon God for a supply of them; and thus to prepare our souls for a grateful reception of the Divine favours: and consequently, the more urgent our prayers are, the more will these ends be answered; and God will be the more glorified by us, when he has imparted to us the desired benefits. It was with such views that Moses¹, Jehosaphat^m, Hezekiahⁿ, and all the saints of old, presented their petitions, enforced and strengthened with the most urgent pleas^o. And it is impossible to feel our need of mercy, without following their example in this particular.]

As a plea, this part of the prayer admirably enforces every petition in it—

[Great are the things which we have asked in it: and utterly unworthy are we to offer such petitions at the throne of grace: but God is a mighty Sovereign, who “may do what he will with his own,” and therefore may hear and answer *us*, though we be the meanest and the vilest of the human race. It is this idea which we express, when we say, “*for thine is the kingdom.*” The word *for* shews that it has respect to what goes before, and that we urge this consideration as a plea, to enforce the preceding petitions. Next to the *sovereign right* of God to answer us, we plead his *power*. Nothing short of omnipotence can effect the things which we desire of God in this prayer: but HE is almighty, and all-sufficient: “with him all things are possible:” and we acknowledge our conviction, that “there is nothing too hard for him.” Lastly we plead “the *glory*” which he will derive from granting all the things which we have prayed for; in the conversion and salvation of the world at large, and in every mercy vouchsafed to ourselves in particular, whether in the supply of our

¹ Exod. xxxii. 11—13.

^m 2 Chron. xx. 5—12.

ⁿ Isai. xxxvii. 15—20.

^o Isai. li. 9, 10. & lxiii. 15—19. & particularly Jer. xiv. 21, 22.

our bodily wants, or in the pardon of our sins and the preservation of our souls. This *sovereignty* and this *power* are his immutable perfections; and this *glory* will result to him through all eternity, even "*for ever*" and ever.

Such considerations may well animate us in our addresses at the throne of Grace, and encourage us in a further confirmation of our petitions by the word "*Amen*."

We have already mentioned one sense of the word *Amen*; namely, that it is a full *assent* to all that has been uttered. But it has another meaning also, and imports a *desire* that the things which have been asked may be granted^p. In this latter sense it is often doubled, in order to express more strongly the ardour of that desire^q. Would we understand its just import? we may see it illustrated in the prayer of Daniel; where, having enforced his petitions by many urgent pleas, he comes at last to renew them all with redoubled ardour; not indeed by the word *Amen*, but in a more copious strain, expressive of the idea contained in it^r.

In the Apostolic age the use of this word was universal in the Church: whilst one person addressed the Lord in the name of the whole assembly, all who were present added their "*Amen*," and thereby made every petition and thanksgiving their own^s. Nor has the word lost its use and emphasis even in heaven: for the whole choir, both of saints and angels, are represented as using it *in both the senses that we have mentioned*; "*saying, AMEN: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. AMEN!*" O that, in adding our *Amen* to the prayer before us, we might resemble *them*; and so utter it now from our inmost souls, that we may be counted worthy to utter it in full concert with them to all eternity!]

^p Rev. xxii. 20.

^q Ps. lxxii. 18, 19.

^r Dan. ix. 17—19.

^s 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

^t Rev. vii. 11, 12.

DCXCI.

A FORGIVING SPIRIT NECESSARY TO OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD.

Matt. vi. 14, 15. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive your trespasses: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

THE different petitions of the Lord's Prayer are collected from different parts of the Old Testament,

ment, and concentrated so as to form a concise and comprehensive summary of all that we need to pray for. But there is annexed to one of the petitions a limitation, which was altogether new, and which greatly needed some elucidation. Our Lord however did not stop to explain it at the time, but finished the prayer first, and then added, in confirmation of it, the words which we have now read; shewing us thereby that the clause had not been lightly introduced, but was of great importance, and indispensable necessity. It certainly appeared strange, that we should presume to make our own compassion towards others the pattern and the measure of God's compassion towards us: but our Lord would have us to know, that it will be in vain to expect mercy at God's hands, unless we exercise it towards our fellow-creatures: on this condition, and on this only, can we hope for acceptance with him in the day of judgment.

Having already had repeated occasion to consider the subject of forgiveness of injuries, we shall now advert rather to the manner in which that duty is here enjoined; and shall shew,

I. In what sense the salvation of the Gospel may be called conditional—

This subject has been a fruitful source of controversy in the Church of Christ: but both sides of the question are true according to the sense which we annex to the word "condition."

Salvation is *not* conditional in a way of compact—

[There are those who think that God engages to give us heaven, if we will perform so many good works; and that, when we have performed those good works, we may claim heaven as a debt. But to affirm that salvation is conditional in any such sense as this, would entirely make void the Gospel of Christ. Salvation would then be of works, and not of grace. It would be to no purpose to say, that these terms were procured for us by Jesus Christ, and that we must therefore refer the honour of our salvation unto him, and accept our reward as the purchase of his blood: for, though the *procuring* of the terms might be
his

691.] NECESSITY OF A FORGIVING SPIRIT.

his act, the *performing* of them must be *ours*: and when we had performed them, we should have whereof to glory before God. But by the Gospel all glorying is excluded^a: and therefore salvation cannot be conditional in the way that we are now speaking of.]

But salvation is conditional in a way of inseparable connexion—

[“God has chosen men to salvation;” but it is “through sanctification of the Spirit, and through belief of the truth^b.” Faith and holiness are required of us; but the performance of them gives us a claim upon God only so far as he has freely engaged himself by his own gracious promises; it does not warrant us to expect any thing on the ground of merit: we cannot go to God, as labourers that have performed their task, and say, “Pay me that thou owest:” on the contrary, “if we had done all that was commanded us, we should still account ourselves unprofitable servants;” and must accept life as the free gift of God for Christ’s sake^c. But still we must do these things; and without doing them we cannot possibly be saved. God has appointed the means as well as the end; and the end is to be attained only in and by the means. It is certainly true that “the purpose of God according to election shall stand^d,” but it is no less true, that it shall be effected only in the way that he has appointed; and that, whatever men may fancy about their predestination to eternal life, “except they repent they shall all perish;” and “if they believe not, they shall not see life;” and “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” In this sense therefore salvation is conditional: the obligations that are upon us are indispensable; and no person whatever shall be saved who disregards them.]

The import of the term condition being fixed, we shall proceed to shew,

II. The reasonableness of the condition here imposed—

Here it will be proper to mark the precise nature and limits of the condition imposed—

[The forgiving of others is not so to be understood as to supersede the exercise of *magisterial authority*. God has appointed Magistrates as his vicegerents in the world, and has put the sword into their hands “for the punishment of evil-doers, and the support of them that do well:” and if

^a Rom. iii. 27. ^b 2 Thess. ii. 13. ^c Rom. vi. 23. ^d Rom. ix. 11.

they should forbear "to execute wrath" upon those who violate the laws, they would themselves be guilty of a dereliction of their public duty. Such lenity therefore is not comprehended in the duty which is here inculcated. Neither does the duty here spoken of altogether prohibit us from the *personal exercise of our just rights*, either for self-defence, or for the obtaining of legal redress. The apostle Paul pleaded his right as a Roman citizen in order to protect himself against the injuries with which he was menaced; and appealed to the tribunal of Cesar to obtain that justice which was denied him in the inferior courts. He has indeed expressed his disapprobation of a litigious spirit, and especially such a shameful exercise of it as led Christians to drag one another before the tribunals of Heathens. But he does not prohibit Christians from submitting their claims to the arbitration of judicious persons among themselves; and consequently he does not require us so to forgive those who injure us, as *in no case* to seek redress. If the only alternative be to suffer an injury, or by angry contention to embroil ourselves in difficulties and quarrels, our Lord has determined the point for us, and bidden us to "turn the other cheek to a man who has smitten us," rather than retaliate the injury, or do ourselves a still greater injury by yielding to a vindictive spirit. But to a certain extent, the support of our just rights is necessary for the preservation of the peace of the community; and consequently we not only are *permitted*, but *bound*, in some instances, to maintain our rights, and to punish those who would rob us of them.

But nothing is ever to be done from a vindictive spirit. The smallest disposition to revenge is strictly prohibited. We not only must not avenge ourselves, but must not for a moment be pleased with the news that any evil has happened even to our most inveterate enemy. So far from wishing him evil, we ought to the uttermost to do him good: to love and bless him when he hates and curses us; and to pray fervently to God for him, at the very time he is doing us all the injury in his power. The work of retribution must be left to God, "to whom alone vengeance belongeth;" and we must content ourselves with "heaping coals of fire upon his head," to melt him into love.

Now on our performance of this duty God suspends the salvation of our souls.]

The reasonableness of this condition will easily appear—

[If we exercise this grace of forgiveness from proper motives,

motives, and in a becoming manner, it will be a clear evidence that we are renewed in the spirit of our minds. There are, it is true, some persons of so easy and gentle a disposition, that they would rather pass by an offence than be at the trouble to resent it. But the forgiving spirit of which we are speaking must proceed from a sense of our own utter unworthiness, and of the exceeding greatness of that debt which has been forgiven us. It must proceed also from a sense of love and gratitude to our Lord and Saviour, and from a desire to honour him by treading in his steps and "walking as he walked." Now where such principles and such conduct are found, there will every other grace be found also: there is in an eminent degree the image of God enstamped upon the soul; and there is "a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light." It is reasonable therefore that such a person, possessed of such humility, such faith, such love, such patience, such self-denial, and such an obediential frame, should be forgiven by his God. There is a perfect correspondence between his work and his reward.

On the contrary, a person of an unforgiving spirit shews, beyond a doubt, that he is altogether unhumbled for his own sins. If he had a proper consciousness of the guilt which he himself has contracted, he would feel no disposition to cast a stone at others; nor would he take a fellow-servant by the throat for a few pence, when he was sensible how many talents he himself owed unto his God. Who, that reads the parable by which our Lord has illustrated this subject, does not see the equity of the sentence passed upon the unforgiving servant? So must also that universal sentence be accounted reasonable by every dispassionate man, "He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy^e."

On whichever side then we view the condition, it appears most reasonable: it is most reasonable that the forgiving should be pardoned, and the unforgiving punished: and knowing as we do the determination of God to act agreeably to this rule, we must prepare to expect our sentence of condemnation or acquittal according to it.]

From this one subject we may obtain a deep insight into Christianity: we may behold,

1. Its consistency—

[Persons from different motives are apt to represent the declarations of God in his word as at variance with each other; and, according to their respective views, to

wrest

^e Matt. xviii. 23—35.

^f Jam. ii. 13.

wrest the meaning of them for the purpose of maintaining their own particular system. Some, because the grace of God is freely proclaimed to sinners, will not endure the mention of a condition, or admit that there is any kind of conditionality in such passages as that before us. Others, because of such passages, will not endure to hear of God's electing grace, which they suppose to be inconsistent with them. Others again, because of the difficulty of reducing every thing to their comprehension, are ready to reject Christianity as altogether inconsistent with itself. But there are no two positions in the whole book of God, which are inconsistent with each other. That there are difficulties, we admit: but so there are also in every other work of God, whether of creation or providence: and if there were none in the work of Redemption, we should have reason to think that it was not really of divine original. No man that ever lived could reconcile the existence of sin with the holiness of God: but is there therefore an absolute inconsistency between them? Does not every one see that the inability to reconcile them arises from the weakness of our intellect and the narrow limits of our knowledge? The same difficulty is complained of by some in reference to the subject before us: but it is obvious, from the statement we have made, that enough may be said to satisfy an humble mind, though there may still be difficulties left for the confounding of a proud spirit. This is really the case with respect to every other doctrine in the Bible: there may be, as in some works of human art, wheels moving in a variety of directions, and appearing to an ignorant person to obstruct each other; but there is an unity in the whole design, and a subserviency in every part to the production of one common end.

Let us then be on our guard against that controversial spirit that leads men to wrest or stumble at the word of God: and, if there be difficulties which we cannot reconcile, let us be content to say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."]

2. Its equity—

[It is astonishing to hear with what presumption many will arraign the justice of God: "If he has not elected me, how can I help myself? If he imposes on me conditions which I cannot perform, with what equity will he condemn me?" The Apostle's answer to such proud objectors is that which most befits their state: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Yet the subject before us may suffice to shew, that "God will be justified in his

his sayings, and be clear when he judgeth:" the day of judgment is called "the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" and such it will appear to all. Those who now quarrel with the deep doctrines of predestination and election, will then find, that God has ordered every thing in perfect wisdom and equity. None will then presume to arraign his counsels. None will then object that any are saved or condemned contrary to strict justice. Not one ungodly person will be found amongst those that are saved, nor one godly person among those that perish: Both the forgiving and unforgiving will have judgment "measured to them, according as they have meted unto others;" and every man's happiness or misery will be exactly apportioned to him according to his works. The godly indeed will feel no difficulty in ascribing their salvation to God and to the Lamb; but the ungodly must for ever ascribe their condemnation to their own incorrigible folly and wickedness.]

3. Its excellency—

[The evils which Christianity is intended to remedy, are guilt and wickedness: and these it does remedy most effectually. Forgiveness of sins is freely offered to every penitent Believer, without any respect to the number or greatness of his offences: "the blood of Jesus Christ shall cleanse him from all sin:" if only the sinner believe in Jesus, "he shall be justified from all things," without exception. But does Christianity make no provision for holiness? Does it leave men a prey to evil dispositions, and a torment to each other? No: it requires a change both of heart and life: it requires the exercise of universal love: it requires a conformity to God himself: it saves not one single person, whom it does not first of all change into the image of God, and make "perfect as God himself is perfect." Were Christianity universally prevalent, and if it had its full operation in every heart, there would be no unkindness in men towards each other, nor any trouble in their own minds. O that its influence were more generally known, and more powerfully felt! Let those at least who profess to have embraced it in sincerity and truth, shew forth its power. Let them shew what amiable tempers it produces in the mind, and what a lovely carriage it produces in the life. If at any time they receive an injury, instead of meditating revenge, let them say, "Now has my God given me an opportunity of recommending religion, and of glorifying his name: now has he called me to display the excellency of his Gospel and the efficacy of his grace." Such

Such conduct would serve as an evidence to our own minds that we are the Lord's, and would constrain others also to acknowledge that God is with us of a truth.]

DCXCII.

DIRECTIONS RESPECTING FASTING.

Matt. vi. 16—18. *Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

IN temporal concerns, men rarely, if ever, confound the means with the end: they expect not the end, but in the use of means; nor do they use the means, but in reference to the end: they put both in their proper place, subordinating the one to the other, and using the one in order to the other. But in religion, nothing is more common than either to separate or confound them: to separate, by expecting the end without the means; or to confound them, by resting in the means, as if they were the end. For instance: God has appointed fasting as the means of advancing our souls in holiness; but whilst some expect to attain holiness without any such self-denying exertions, others rest in the duty itself, and make that their righteousness. Of the former description are the generality of Christians at this day: of the latter were the Pharisees of old, against whose errors our Lord is guarding his Disciples throughout the whole of this sermon on the Mount. In the foregoing chapter he has rectified our views in relation to sin: he now rectifies them in relation to duty.

In considering the words before us, we shall notice,

I. What

I. What is implied in them—

It is obvious, that, whilst our Lord gives us directions *how* to fast, he intimates,

1. That fasting is a duty—

[Of this there can be no doubt. Some indeed have thought, that the only fast required of us was to abstain from the commission of sin: but, by the same mode of interpreting other parts of this chapter, they will set aside prayer and almsgiving; both of which are required here, not by a positive precept, but by implication only, precisely as fasting is required in the text.]

Under the Jewish economy there was an annual fast, which all were bound to observe with great strictness, namely, that on the great day of atonement^a. On particular occasions other fasts were instituted: by Joshua, when some of his men had been slain by the men of Ai^b: by the eleven tribes of Israel, when in two successive conflicts they had been defeated with great slaughter by the tribe of Benjamin^c. Besides other public fasts ordered by those in authority, we find the most eminent of God's servants observing fasts in private. David, as well on account of the unhappy state of his enemies, as on account of his own personal afflictions, "wept and chastened his soul with fasting"^d: and Daniel, desirous of knowing the time which God had fixed for the deliverance of his people from Babylon, sought the Lord, not in prayer only, but "with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes"^e. These things, though observed under the law, shew that fasting was not a mere legal ordinance, which in due time was to be disannulled; but a mode of worship suited to the necessities of our fallen nature, and acceptable to God at all times. Indeed, the Heathens themselves saw the propriety of approaching God in this manner; insomuch that the Governors of Nineveh, when threatened with the Divine judgments, proclaimed a fast, and caused it to be strictly observed, not by the people only, but even by the beasts themselves^f.]

2. That all his followers would be observant of it—

[This he takes for granted: for why should he give them directions respecting an ordinance which he did not intend them to observe, and which he knew they would not observe? It is manifest that he expected his people

to

^a Lev. xxiii. 26—31.^b Josh. vii. 6.^c Judg. xx. 26.^d Ps. xxxv. 13. 2 Sam. xii. 16.^e Dan. ix. 3.^f Jon. iii. 6—8.

to fast, as well as to give alms and pray; and indeed, on another occasion, he declared they *should* fast. During his presence with them, it would not have been expedient for him to require it, (because his Disciples were not yet prepared for such austerities;) nor would it have been suited to their state and condition, (because it was rather a season proper for holy joy :) but after his removal from them, there would be abundant occasion for such self-denying duties; and his Disciples would be strengthened for the performance of them^s. Accordingly we find that they were “in fastings often,” and that they rarely addressed themselves to any extraordinary duty, such as that of ordaining Elders, or separating persons to the work of the Ministry, without having first implored direction from God in fasting and prayer^h.]

Having shewn that there is a duty implied in the text, we proceed to consider,

II. What is expressed—

Here are directions given for the due performance of this duty. It should be performed,

1. Unostentatiously—

[Religion, of a certain kind at least, was in high repute among the Jews: and consequently there was a great temptation to assume an appearance of piety amongst them. Hence the Pharisees observed frequent fast-days, (generally “twice in the week,”) and studiously endeavoured to attract the attention of others by their squalid appearance. They omitted to cleanse and anoint themselves; as at other times; and “disfigured their faces,” probably by dust and ashes which they had strewed on their heads, or, at all events, by downcast and gloomy looks.

Similar temptations do not occur to us: the habits of modern times are not such as to render that kind of sanctity an object of applause: it would rather be thought an indication of insanity: and therefore hypocrisy is rarely seen amongst us in that garb. Nevertheless, the caution against an ostentatious display of piety is at no time unreasonable. Diversity of customs, however they may produce a change in the modes of shewing hypocrisy, make no change at all in the dispositions of the heart: and therefore we must understand this caution as extending to every thing whereby our religious exercises may be ostentatiously displayed.]

2. Sincerely—

^s Matt. ix. 14—17.

^h Acts xiii. 2, 3. & xiv. 23.

2. Sincerely—

[As, on the one hand, we are not to desire to be seen of men, so, on the other hand, we should act as in the presence of the all-seeing God. But here we fail. In seasons of great public calamity, our Government has always called us to humble ourselves before God: and the words which we have uttered at such times have been well suited to the occasion. But how little of real repentance has God seen amongst us! The true way to keep a fast unto the Lord, is by deep humiliation of our souls, and a resolute amendment of our lives. The former is inculcated by the prophet Joelⁱ, ——— the latter by the prophet Isaiah^k ——— But in how few instances have our professions been realized! Well may God complain of us, as of his people of old, “When ye did fast, did ye fast unto me, even unto me?” Truly, *in sincerity of heart* we have been as deficient as ever the Pharisees of old were: and the only difference between them and us has been, that they had the appearance of piety without the reality, and we have been equally destitute of both: we have, with the exception of uttering a few words in a place of worship, rejected even the form of that duty, which we ought to have observed in deed and in truth. But “God is not deceived; nor will he be mocked:” if we thus pour contempt on him and his ordinances, he will require it at our hands at the last day. Let us then, on every renewed occasion, endeavour so to approve ourselves to God, that “he who seeth in secret may reward us openly.”]

In the review of this subject, we may LEARN,

1. Whence it is that religion is at such a low ebb amongst us—

[Many are convinced of their lost estate, and live miserably under a sense of guilt, without ever obtaining either pardon of their sins, or victory over them. The reason is precisely that which is stated by our Lord himself: “they seek to enter in at the strait gate, but are not able, because they do not strive.” They do not rise to the occasion: if a few wishes would be effectual, they would soon become new creatures: but if days of fasting and humiliation be found requisite, they will not submit to such a task: they will rather lose heaven, than be at so much cost to obtain it. They find by experience, that what our Lord said respecting some evil-spirits whom his Disciples could not cast out, is true respecting some of their deep-rooted

ⁱ Joel ii. 12, 13.

^k Isaiah lviii. 5—7.

^l Zech. vii. 5, 6.

rooted lusts and habits: "That kind goeth not forth, but by prayer and fasting:" but, as they will not use the means of deliverance, God leaves them still in bondage; and "they are led captive by the devil at his will."

The want of proficiency in many religious people must be traced to the same source: they do not aspire after high degrees of piety; they are satisfied with low attainments, and with scanty measures of peace and joy. What might they not attain, if they would even learn of a heathen Centurion to abound in fasting and prayer^m! How much happier too, as well as holier, would married persons be, if they were occasionally to practise those habits which obtained frequently in the primitive Churchⁿ! Let it be remembered by us, that they who will build high, must dig deep; and, that the more we are abased in humiliation and contrition, the more shall we be exalted in peace and joy.]

2. Whence it is that our nation is still under the afflicting hand of God^o—

[To those who would shew true patriotism, we would recommend the example of Nehemiah^p; confident that such intercessors are the real bulwark of the nation——— If the humiliation of so wicked a prince as Ahab succeeded so far as to defer the judgments of God to the next generation, we may well hope, that the genuine repentance of many would prevail for the entire removal of them from our land. "As long as we continued to seek the Lord, the Lord would make us to prosper."]

^m Acts x. 30.

ⁿ 1 Cor. vii. 5.

^o This was preached in 1810, when war had continued almost twenty years, and we had disregarded as many calls to public humiliation; or rather had made them so many occasions of increasing and aggravating our guilt.

^p Neh. i. 4.

DCXCIII.

LAYING UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN.

Matt. vi. 19—21. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where*

where thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

MUCH of our Lord's sermon on the Mount was intended to explain the true import of the Law, in opposition to the false glosses with which the Scribes and Pharisees had obscured it. But in many parts of it the instruction is general, and unconnected with any particular persons or circumstances. The Pharisees indeed were covetous: but the whole human race are more intent on earthly than on heavenly things; and therefore the exhortation in our text may be considered as equally important in every age and place.

In discoursing upon it, we shall consider,

I. The direction given—

This consists of two parts, the one negative, the other positive:

1. The negative part—

[This is not to be understood as though there were no situation or circumstances wherein it were allowable to lay up money: for it is certainly the duty of all persons to make provision for those whose subsistence depends upon them: those who should refuse to support their aged parents or relatives would be deemed worse than infidels^a: nor, by parity of reasoning, can they be considered as acting more suitably to their Christian profession who neglect to make a necessary provision for their children^b. But we may gather from the very terms in which the direction is expressed, what are the limitations with which it is to be understood. The *measure*, the *manner*, the *end*, are all clearly defined. We are not to lay up "treasures." What is necessary for the carrying on of our trade, or for the supporting of ourselves in old age, or for the enabling of our family to maintain that rank of life wherein they have been educated, may be considered as allowable: but what is laid up for the sake of enriching and aggrandizing our family, may be justly included in the prohibition before us. Of course, no precise sum can be fixed; because what would be wealth to one man, would be poverty to another: but whatever argues discontent, and a desire of elevating ourselves and our families above the rank which Providence has allotted us in life, should be regarded with a jealous eye

^a Tim. v. 8.

^b 2 Cor. xii. 14.

eye and a trembling heart. The "*treasuring up treasures*," as the original term imports, may not unfitly represent to us that kind of solicitude which our Lord forbids. Though it is a mode of expression quite common in the Greek, yet it conveys an idea of eagerness and covetousness which are altogether contrary to the Christian character. Christianity does not require a man to cast away, or even to give away, his paternal inheritance, or all the fruits of his own labour: but it absolutely forbids him to find delight in treasuring up his wealth, or in looking to it as a source either of safety or happiness. The laying up of treasures "*for ourselves*" is also particularly forbidden: and in this view there is little difference, whether we have respect to our own personal comfort, or the comfort of our children, who are, in fact, a part of ourselves. The saying, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years," argues a sordid and earthly mind; and renders us peculiarly obnoxious to the Divine displeasure.

Thus the prohibitory part of this direction must be taken somewhat in a qualified sense, as it respects the *act*; though it is altogether unqualified, as it respects the *habit* of our minds.]

2. The positive part—

[Here there is not the same necessity for assigning any limits to the expression, or for guarding persons against excess in their endeavours to follow the Divine command. Here the *measure*, the *manner*, the *end* of our desires should accord with the full import of the words themselves. What we lay up in heaven should be considered as our richest "*treasure*:" and we should "*treasure it up*" with insatiable avidity. We should lay it up also with an especial view to "*ourselves*." What we now possess we should dispose of for the good of others; but what we lay up in heaven can be enjoyed by ourselves only; and should be regarded by us as the only portion deserving our pursuit.

This then is the direction which we are to follow: and herein we may well take for our guides those persons who go abroad for the acquisition of wealth. They go thither for one fixed purpose, which they follow uniformly during their continuance there. They never for a moment forget that they are labouring with a view to their future happiness in their native country. They never suffer a year to pass without inquiring how far they have succeeded in expediting or securing the great object before them. They lose no opportunity of remitting home the produce of their labour; and they feel increasing satisfaction in proportion as the
time

time approaches for the termination of their present exertions, and the complete fruition of their long-wished-for enjoyments. So should it be with *us*. We should follow our present occupations as subservient to future happiness: we should account every day lost which has not added somewhat to our store, and laid a foundation for eternal bliss. We should make our remittances from time to time, depositing to the utmost of our power in the bank of Heaven; and should consider ourselves as rich, not in proportion to what we spend at present, but rather in proportion to what we can lay up for future enjoyment.]

Let us now turn our attention to;

II. The reasons with which it is enforced—

These are taken from different sources:

1. From the comparative value of the different kinds of treasure—

[Earthly treasure, of whatever kind it be, is perishable in its nature, and uncertain in its duration: whereas heavenly treasure is incorruptible, and eternal. The wealth of the antients consisted much in the number of their superb garments, which “moths” might easily destroy. Even their precious metals might at last be consumed by “rust” and canker; and at all events they might be taken away by deceit or violence. The uncertainty of earthly possessions was never more manifest than in the present age. But if we be rich in faith and in good works, if we have laid up treasures of that kind in heaven, what shall ever lessen their value, or who shall ever rob us of the enjoyment of them? “No moth or rust shall ever corrupt them; no thief shall ever break through to steal them.”]

Say then, Whether this be not reason sufficient for laying up treasures in heaven, rather than on earth? Even if we could realize all our expectations with respect to this world, our happiness must be short, because life itself is coming speedily to a close: but there is not a human Being who does not feel the insufficiency of earthly things to make him happy: What then can they contribute to our happiness in that day, when nothing of them shall remain, except the fearful responsibility for having idolized and abused them, and the tremendous judgments of God for having suffered them to alienate our minds from him? But the very exercise of grace is happiness, independent of the reward which it will receive in glory; and the more we abound in good works now, the happier shall we be to all

all eternity; for “every one shall receive according to his own labour.”]

2. From their uniform influence upon the heart—

[Whatever our treasure be, it will occupy the supreme place in our affections, and engage in its service the noblest powers of our souls. But is such regard due to any *earthly* thing? Does not *God* claim our heart as his throne, on which he is to reign without a rival? Has he not required us to love HIM with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength?” If then we make any thing else our treasure, we rob him of his honour, and cast him down from his throne. And will he not fearfully reagent such conduct? Will he not say, Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me? Surely this consideration may well instruct us in the path we are to pursue: it proclaims loudly to us, “Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.” If, indeed, God would be contented with a divided heart, we might be less scrupulous about the objects of our pursuit: but as “he is a jealous God,” and “will not give his glory to another,” it becomes us to live in this world “as pilgrims and sojourners,” and to direct all our efforts towards the attainment of his favour and his inheritance.]

This subject affords abundant occasion,

1. For reproof—

[Would one not suppose, from the conduct of the world at large, that our Lord’s instructions had been the very reverse of what they are? If he had bidden us lay up treasures on earth, and not in heaven, he had found us a very obedient people. But his command is plain; and it is at the peril of our souls to disobey it. True it is, that a compliance with it is deemed folly; and an habitual violation of it is accounted wisdom^c: but “God seeth not as man seeth:” his judgment respecting this is the very reverse of theirs^d; and by that shall our doom be regulated in the eternal world — — —]

Think not that we mean to decry industry; for diligence in earthly pursuits is recommended and enjoined by God himself^e: but it is the regarding of earthly things as the sources of our happiness that is condemned in the text: and if we will make them our treasure, they are the only treasure which we shall ever possess — — —]

2. For

^c Ps. xlix. 18.

^d Luke xi. 20.

^e Rom. xii. 11. Eccl. ix. 10.

2. For encouragement—

[If it were necessary to lay up treasures on earth, you might well be discouraged. One might say, I have not abilities for it; another, I have no capital to trade with; another, There are too many competitors in my line of business; another, I have been robbed and impoverished by a treacherous partner, or a dishonest creditor. But no such grounds of discouragement exist in relation to heavenly treasures. The wisest philosopher has no advantage over the most illiterate peasant; there is equal access afforded to every one to the inexhaustible riches of Christ, by the improvement of which alone any one can be made "rich towards God;" competitors for heavenly wealth promote, instead of impeding, each other's success: nor shall either deceit or violence ever prevail against those who commit their cause to God. Let all of us then unite in this glorious work: let us be satisfied with no attainments; but "covet earnestly the best gifts;" let us be ever "pressing forward, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before." Whatever we have of this world's goods, let us lay them out for the Lord with prudent generosity; let us "lend" them to him, and he will repay us again. But if we are poor in this world, let us honour the Lord by cheerful contentment; assured that every grace we exercise, whether passive or active, shall be richly "recompensed at the resurrection of the just."]

DCXCIV.

THE SERVICES OF GOD AND MAMMON INCONSISTENT.

Matt. vi. 24. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

THE dictates of pure and undefiled religion are so remote from the apprehension of the natural man, and so contrary to his inclinations, that they need to be presented to him with the clearest evidence, and most convincing energy. Hence our blessed Lord continually illustrated his doctrines

by images taken from common life, or by truths universally known and acknowledged. The irreconcilableness of the service of God with the service of Mammon is very little considered: the world in general have no idea of it: but the impossibility of being wholly at the disposal of two earthly masters is obvious enough; because, when their commands interfere with each other, the servant, in obeying one, must disobey the other; and in cleaving to one, must, virtually, renounce the other. This being acknowledged, we are prepared to confess the same in relation to God and Mammon. It is thus that our Lord introduces and confirms the aphorism before us: in discoursing upon which, we shall shew,

I. The import of our Lord's assertion—

“Mammon” is a Syriac word, signifying *riches*; and it is the great idol to which all the world are bowing down. But as wealth is principally sought for on account of its connexion with pleasures and honour, we need not confine ourselves to the precise idea of riches; but consider Mammon as signifying *the world* with all its poor vanities, of whatever kind they be.

But what are we to understand by “*serving*” God and Mammon? Here is the difficulty; and this is a point that must be determined with much caution and judgment. When our Lord says, “Ye cannot *serve* God and Mammon,”

He does not mean that we cannot render them *any* services—

[This is not the case even with earthly masters: for we may serve two or three masters, provided they be contented with services that are *partial*, *subordinate*, or *successive* — — — And in such a manner as this, we may serve both God and Mammon.]

He does not mean that we cannot render them the services which are *their due*—

[If only we clearly ascertain what services are *due* to each, we shall find that they are not at all incompatible with each

each other. Those who are averse to perform their duties to God, are very apt to represent them as inconsistent with the duties of relative and social life. But this is without any just foundation. It would be strange indeed if the duties of the two tables opposed each other: on the contrary, we cannot truly perform the one without performing the other also: in serving God, we shall serve the world; and in serving the world, we shall serve our God.]

His meaning is, that we cannot render them the services which *they require*—

[God requires that we should love and serve him with *all* our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. He requires, that every thing bad, shall be renounced for him; every thing indifferent, be subordinated to him; and every thing good, be done with a direct reference to his will as the rule, and his glory as the end.

The world, on the contrary, prescribes laws and maxims for our conduct which God has never prescribed, yea, which he has expressly forbidden. And it is in this contrariety of the one to the other, that we must look for the fuller explanation of the words before us.]

Let us then proceed to state, in reference to this assertion,

II. The grounds and reasons of it—

If it be asked, Why can we not serve both God and Mammon? we answer, Because

1. Their interests are different—

[God has a cause which is exceeding dear to him; a cause which occupied his mind from all eternity, and for the promotion of which he has given his only-begotten Son to die for us, and his blessed Spirit to instruct us. The interest he pursues, is the reign of Christ on earth, and the establishment of his kingdom throughout the world^a. He longs to bring down heaven upon earth, that men may be, as nearly as possible, in a paradisiacal state, and in a constant meetness for glory^b.

The world knows nothing of such an interest as this: it proposes nothing of the kind: on the contrary, to please and gratify the carnal mind is the one scope of all its plans. In pursuit of this it labours to draw away its votaries from the consideration of heavenly things, and to fix their attention upon the things of time and sense.

What

^a Rev. xi. 15.

^b 2 Pet. iii. 13.

What prospect have we then of rendering acceptable service to those whose interests are so widely different?]

2. Their commands are contrary—

[God commands us to “make our light shine before men:” he tells us “not to be conformed to this world,” but to “come out from it,” and to be “crucified to it through the cross of Christ;” and not only to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them.”

Against all this the world sets its face. It does not approve that we should serve God even in secret: but that we should trouble others with our light, this is insufferable. How peremptory it is in its commands respecting this, may be seen in every age, from the time of Cain to this present moment^c.

Now how is it possible that we should render obedience to both these masters? The one says, “Arise, shine:” the other says, “Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.” It is evident, that, whichever we obey, we must of necessity disobey the other.]

3. Their services are inconsistent—

[This appears in part from what has been already spoken. But the inconsistency is expressly and frequently stated by God himself. “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him^d:” “the friendship of the world is enmity with God^e:” “the minding of earthly things marks us enemies of the cross of Christ^f:” “the carnal mind is enmity against God^g;” and “we must mortify it, if ever we would live^h.”

Here the point is determined by God himself: and it is carried further than under the preceding head: for, if we would serve God acceptably, we must not only in some things disobey the commands of the world, but must utterly renounce all kind of allegiance to it. We must even oppose it, and fight against it. To parley with it, is perfidy; to make a truce with it, is treason.]

People standing very differently affected towards the world, we must ADDRESS,

1. Those who are altogether servants of the world—

[Too many, alas! think not of any thing but the world: they

^c John vii. 7. ² Tim. iii. 12. See a specimen, Esth. iii. 8, 9. Acts xvi. 19—24. and xvii. 6, 7.

^d 1 John, ii. 15, 16.

^e Jam. iv. 4.

^f Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^g Rom. viii. 7.

^h ib. ver. 13.

they find no pleasure but in its services. Now, we grant that its service is pleasing to flesh and blood: but to whom has it ever afforded solid and permanent satisfaction?—— But suppose it could satisfy us *here*, what can it do for us *hereafter*? If we have served *it*, we must look to *it* for our reward. We cannot expect any reward from God, except indeed that which our contempt of him has merited, “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.”]

2. Those who are endeavouring to unite the services of God and Mammon—

[Notwithstanding our Lord has so plainly declared the absurdity of all such attempts, men will not be persuaded to desist from them. They think that they may serve God sufficiently to secure his blessing, and yet serve the world in such a manner as to retain its favour. But, in addition to what our Lord has spoken, such persons have also within themselves a demonstration that their wishes are impracticable. What is the state of their minds after mixing with worldly company, and drinking of the cup of worldly pleasures? Can they go to their God with freedom, and find access to him with confidence? Have they any enlargement of heart in their addresses to him? Are not their services a mere form—a cold, lifeless ceremony, in which they find no pleasure, and from which they derive no benefit? Is it not manifest that they make no progress in religion; and that, while their services are divided, the world has their hearts? Such people’s religion answers no other end than to deceive and ruin them for ever: for God is “a jealous God;” and will despise the offerings of a divided heart.]

3. Those who are halting between the two—

[Many are convinced that they ought to serve God alone; and yet they know not how to turn their backs upon the world: they are afraid of the contempt and ridicule which they shall incur, or of some losses which they shall sustain: and therefore they are undecided in their minds, how to act. But what folly is this! Is not the approbation of God and of our own conscience sufficient to counterbalance all the frowns of the world? and is not heaven sufficient to compensate for any sufferings which we can be called to endure on earth? Let it only be remembered that eternity is at hand; and *that* will be sufficient to make all the concerns of time to appear lighter than vanity itself. Our Lord has plainly told us, that

that we must "hate even our life itself, if we would be his disciples." Let us then make our choice: "If Mammon be God, let us serve him; but if Jehovah be God, let us serve himⁱ." Let us say, with Joshua, "We will serve the Lord^k."]

4. Those who are decidedly in the service of their God—

[Who amongst you has ever found reason to regret that he took a decided part? Who has not found it a ground of exceeding thankfulness to God for enabling him so to act? Go on then, having the world under your feet, and God in your hearts. Be bold, yet be meek, in the service of your Lord. Be meek, I say, and patient under any trials you may meet with. You must carefully distinguish between the ways of the world and the people of it: the former you are to regard with aversion; the latter with pity. Let it be seen in your temper, as well as in your conduct, "whose you are, and whom you serve." Shew that though you refuse to be servants to the world, you are, its greatest benefactors. And look forward to the day when He will acknowledge and reward your services in the presence of the assembled universe.]

ⁱ 1 Kin. xviii. 21.

^k Josh. xxiv. 15.

DCXCV.

AGAINST CAREFULNESS.

Matt. vi. 25—34. *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink?*

drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

IF we affirm that men must serve God only and with their whole hearts, we appear to them to require more than is necessary, and to assign them a task which it is impossible to perform. But, whilst they are so averse to hear of what God requires, they do not consider how closely privilege and duty are united: for, whilst we yield up ourselves wholly unto God, he, on the other hand, permits us to look to him for a supply of all our wants. As an earthly master provides for the necessities of his servants, so much more will God, who therefore commands us to leave all our affairs to his disposal, and requires an affiance in him as a very essential part of our duty. Hence our blessed Lord having taught us how inconsistent are the services of God and Mammon, adds, "Therefore take no thought for your life;" that is, whilst you are serving God with fidelity, commit all your concerns to him with full confidence in his paternal care.

Let us consider,

I. The caution here given—

The evil against which we are cautioned is *anxious carefulness*—

[St. Paul, to the Corinthians, says, "I would have you without carefulness^a." The word which he uses, is the same as that used by our Lord throughout this whole passage. A *thoughtfulness* about the future is by no means improper: there is a care and a foresight which Christian prudence requires^b; and they who go forward without due deliberation, invariably involve themselves in difficulties^c. The Apostles themselves, who under peculiar circumstances

were

^a 1 Cor. vii. 32.

^b Prov. xxiv. 27.

^c Prov. xxii. 3.

were supported without any care of their own, were afterwards commanded to use such means for their support as prudence dictated^d; and by this rule St. Paul himself walked^e. The ants are proposed to us as examples; and, in truth, we cannot conceive the instinct of animals to be in any thing more worthy of imitation, than theirs is in the particular to which Solomon alludes. They in the harvest lay up what will be necessary for their sustenance in winter: and in like manner should we improve all present opportunities with a view to our future good, both temporal and spiritual^f. But they know nothing of anxious care. Thus precisely should it be with us. We cannot be too industrious in our respective callings; if only we leave events to God, and be satisfied with his dispensations.

There are few perhaps who will not acknowledge, that all anxiety about superfluities, or about very distant events, is wrong; but yet they will vindicate it in reference to things which are near at hand, or are of prime and indispensable necessity. But it is respecting *these very things* that our Lord speaks: he bids us take no thought even about “food or raiment;” no, not even “for the morrow:” and, because we should be ready to pass over such a caution if it were only once or obscurely given, he repeats it no less than four times in the passage before us, sometimes in a way of plain direction, “Take no thought;” at other times in a way of expostulation, “Why take ye thought?” This marks the vast importance of the subject: and it should dispose all our minds to humble submission and cordial acquiescence.]

How much need there is for such a caution, every man’s observation and experience will tell him—

[Even the rich, who on account of their opulence should be thought most out of the reach of this evil, are as much under the power of it as any. No man indeed is exempt from it, unless he have been delivered from it by the grace of God. The worldly man feels it in reference to the things on which his heart is fixed: and even those who are in pursuit of heavenly things, are too often, through the prevalence of unbelief, still subject to its dominion; in-somuch that they are harassed continually with disquieting fears, when they ought rather to be “filled with joy and peace in believing.” There is therefore no order of men to whom this caution is not proper to be given; since all, from

^d Luke xxii. 35, 36.

^e 2 Thess. iii. 8.

^f Prov. vi. 6—8. & xxx. 24, 25.

from the highest to the lowest, stand in need of it; and it is no less applicable to the people of God than to the ignorant and ungodly world; to those who have "a little faith," as well as those who have no faith at all.]

Let us now attend to,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

In this beautiful address, (which cannot be too much admired,) our Lord shews in a very convincing manner that anxious carefulness ought on no account to be indulged.

1. It is unnecessary—

[Let us only look around us, and see what God is doing *in the animal and vegetable creation*; how he feeds the fowls of the air, which make no provision for themselves; and clothes with unrivalled beauty the flowers of the field, which have so short a continuance, and such an ignominious end. Can we conceive that God will take less care of *us*, who are so much higher in the scale of being, and whom he condescends to call his children?

Let us see also what he is doing *in and to ourselves*. He has given us a body, exquisitely wrought, and fitted to be a temple of the Holy Ghost. He has endued it not only with animal life, but with a rational and immortal soul. These also he has preserved even to the present hour; and altogether without any aid from us, or any anxiety on our part. If then he has given and upheld these noble faculties and powers, will he not give such provision as shall be necessary for the preservation of them? Can we suppose that He who has bestowed upon us so much, will withhold or grudge the food or raiment that are necessary for us?

Above all, let us see what he has *engaged to do* for his believing people. They "seek the kingdom of God" to be established in their hearts: they "seek his righteousness" and salvation: they seek "in the first place," and as their one great object, an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the enjoyment of those blessings he has purchased with his blood: and whilst they do this, God has promised that all earthly comforts, as far as they are necessary, "shall be added unto them." Thus, in fact, *they* have a more secure title to earthly things, and a more certain possession of them, than any other people upon earth. What need is there then for such persons to indulge anxious cares about the world? Both *around* them and *within* them they have an evidence of what God *is doing*; and *in the Scriptures of truth* they have a pledge of what God *will do*. Surely,
then,

then, it becomes them to suppress every anxious thought, and to commit all their concerns to the disposal and government of a faithful God.]

2. It is unprofitable—

[*What good can any man obtain by all his anxious cares? Can he add "one cubit to his stature," or one moment to his age?* Can he make one hair black or white; or "do even the least thing," which would not as easily be done without any solicitude at all^b? On the other hand, does not every man who indulges anxiety *greatly injure himself by it*? Every day brings evils enough along with it: and every man shall find scope enough for the exercise of all his patience, without multiplying sources of discontent. What should we think of a man, who, being doomed every day to carry a burthen which he was but just able to support, should be constantly augmenting his labours by taking on him to-morrow's burthen, in addition to that which he was compelled to bear? Yet such is the conduct of those who harbour anxious thoughts about the morrow. And what is a man profited by such folly? What is the effect which he finds invariably produced upon him? Were he to act more wisely, he might pass comfortably through life; but by his own folly he is oppressed and overwhelmed, and his very existence is embittered to him, so that he is almost ready to "choose strangling rather than life."

The manner in which our Lord argues this point, deserves to be attentively considered. We are ready to think in general that carefulness is a fruit and evidence of our wisdom; but he again and again *appeals to our reason*, to convince us of the folly of such a disposition; and defies any human Being to give him a satisfactory reason for indulging it. If therefore we will persist in indulging it, let us prepare an answer to that question of his in the text, "Why take ye thought for raiment?"]

3. It is atheistical—

["After all these things," says our Lord, "do the Gentiles seek." That the Gentiles should be making anxious inquiries about the things of this life, we do not wonder, because they know of no higher objects to be pursued, nor of any God who is able and willing to undertake for them. But does such conduct become *us*?—*us*, who know that

^ε ἡλικίαν.

^h This is certainly the meaning of ver. 27. Compare Luke xii. 25, 26.

that there is a God, and have been taught to call him by the endearing name of Father?—*us*, who profess to regard this world but as a passage to a better, and to have our affections set entirely on things above? To what purpose have we been instructed in the knowledge of God, and in the great mystery of redeeming love? To what purpose have the unsearchable riches of Christ been opened to us, and the ineffable glories of heaven revealed, if, after all, we are to live like Heathens; careful about the body, as if we had no soul; and depending on ourselves, as if there were no God? Venial as anxiety may appear, it proceeds from atheism in the heart; it overlooks his providence; it usurps his power; it places *self* upon his throne. If then we would not perish with the Heathen, or rather under a heavier condemnation than they, in proportion to the superior light we have abused, let us guard against this evil disposition, and look to God to supply all our wants according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. Let us “cast all our care on him,” assured and satisfied that “he careth for us.”]

ADVICE,

Our Lord traces this evil to a want of faithⁱ: hence we see what is its proper *antidote*; and what advice should be given to all who would avoid it. It is that which our Lord himself repeatedly gave to his Disciples, to compose their minds under trials^k, and to qualify them for every part of their arduous undertaking^l: “Have faith in God.” Believe in him,

1. As a God of providence—

[Men think they *honour* God when they limit his operations to what they call great things: but, in fact, they dishonour him exceedingly, for they judge of him by themselves; and, because *they* would be distracted by a multitude of little concerns, they think that *He* would be also; or, at least, that they are unworthy of his attention. But there is nothing, however minute, which he does not order and overrule with as much care as he does the rise and fall of empires. “The very hairs of our head are all numbered.” Let this then be a fixed principle in the mind, that “there is neither good nor evil in the city, but the Lord himself is the doer of it.” As for men and devils, they are all, however unconscious of it, mere agents of his, “a sword in his hand,” with which he effects his own

ⁱ ver. 30.

^k John xiv. 1.

^l Mark xi. 22. gracious

gracious purposes. Be it so then, that we are destitute both of food and raiment for the morrow, and that we know not where to obtain a supply of either, we need not be anxious: for "godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;" and if we call upon him, his word shall be verified, which saith, "They who seek the Lord, shall want no manner of thing that is good:" yea, the very straits and difficulties which we now feel, are "working together for our good," and shall hereafter form a ground of praise and thanksgiving to our God.]

2. As a God of grace—

[It is *this* view of God that will in a moment silence every doubt and fear. Who can reflect on what he has done, in giving his only dear Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify us, and doubt whether he will overlook our necessities, either of soul or body? Hear St. Paul's opinion of that matter: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The Apostle seems surprised that such a doubt should enter into the mind of man. Be ashamed then, ye who are filled with such anxiety about the issue of your warfare, and are saying, like David, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Be ashamed, I say, and learn rather, like Paul, to say, "I know in whom I have believed." You may be reduced to straits in spiritual as well as temporal concerns; but they shall only issue in the fuller manifestation of God's faithfulness and truth. His promise to you is, that "your place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; that bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure^m:" and "He is faithful that hath promised." Trust then in him, and "he will keep you in perfect peace:" trust in him, and he will "give you all things that pertain unto life and godliness;" nor shall you ever be ashamed or confounded world without end.]"

^m Isai. xxxiii. 16.

DCXCVI.

AGAINST UNCHARITABLE JUDGING.

Matt. vii. 1, 2. *Judge not, that ye be not judged: for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

AMONGST the many faults with which the Pharisees of old were chargeable, that of censoriousness

sorinousness appears to have been peculiarly prominent. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee is represented as condemning his fellow-worshipper, and building his own reputation on the ruin of his. To correct that evil disposition, our Lord proceeds to shew the danger of indulging it. We must not however limit his observations as though they were applicable to that people only; for they are of general utility; and the subject they refer to is as necessary for our consideration as for theirs. Some indeed imagine, that a sermon upon such a subject as this is scarcely to be called Evangelical: but it should be remembered, that in the Gospel there are two things,—a foundation, and a superstructure; that both of them are necessary to a complete building; and that if the distinction between their respective uses be kept in view, they equally tend to the edification of our souls.

In discoursing on the words before us, we must notice,

I. The prohibition—

The prohibition, though given in general terms, must of necessity be limited: and it is of great importance to have its limits clearly defined. We shall therefore,

1. Point out what is *not* included in it—

[It does *not* forbid *the exercise of Magisterial judgment*. Magistracy is of God's appointment. It was ordained by him for the restraining of iniquity; and those who are invested with it are "not to bear the sword in vain." They *must* hear, *must* judge, *must* determine, *must* enforce and execute the laws: and they who fulfil their Magisterial duties with zeal and uprightness, are to be regarded among the brightest ornaments and the richest blessings of a land.

It does *not* forbid *the forming of a discreet judgment*, whether of things or persons, *for the regulation of our own conduct*. We are rational Beings, and must walk agreeably to

to the dictates of reason and religion. Are any things proposed to us for adoption? We must examine whether they be worthy of our choice: we must "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good^b." Do any persons tender their advice, and profess to have their views rectified by the word and Spirit of God? We must not immediately take for granted that they are right, or yield ourselves implicitly to their direction: "Believe not every spirit," says St. John; "but try the spirits, whether they be of God^c."

It does not forbid our declaring of the judgments of God against sin and sinners. When we state, that "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," we are considered by many as violating the rules of charity. But charity does not require us to confound good and evil, or to contradict the plainest assertions of Holy Writ: it would be no charity, but rather the greatest cruelty, to act thus: and it is at the peril of our souls to do so^d. We must "in any wise rebuke a brother^e:" we not only must "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but must rather reprove them^f." It was no violation of this law when Paul reprov'd Peter for his dissimulation^g: nor will it be any infringement of our duty to declare, that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God," or to suspend from intercourse with ourselves, and from the communion of the Church, an offending brother^h.

Doubtless, if these things be done in an uncharitable spirit, they are wrong: but, if done with kindness, and from a sense of duty to God, they will be approved and applauded by him.]

2. Mark distinctly what is forbidden—

[The judgment which we pass on others is then faulty, when it is *needless, unfounded, hasty, or severe*.

We are not appointed judges over all mankind; nor have we a right to summon all our fellow-creatures to our bar. If their actions do not concern us, we should let them pass without presuming to pry into the merits of them. We are not to be "busy-bodies in other men's matters." God repeatedly puts the question to us, "Who art thou that judgest another?" The samê question we should put also to ourselves: "What *right* have I to judge him? what *call*? what *occasion*?" And if no necessity is imposed upon

us,

^b 1 Thess. v. 21.

^c Lev. xix. 17.

^d 1 Cor. v. 11—13.

^e 1 John iv. 1.

^f Eph. v. 11.

^g Isai. v. 20.

^h Gal. ii. 11—14.

us, we should leave the exercise of judgment to those to whom it properly belongs.

Not unfrequently do men form a judgment without any just or adequate grounds. There is a strong propensity in the human mind to indulge prejudice, and to harbour unkind thoughts both against individuals and bodies of men without any specific reason. When this is done, we readily listen to any report against the object of our aversion, and put a bad construction upon every thing he says or does. It was thus that our Lord was treated by the Scribes and Pharisees: though he "spake as never man spake," and was altogether "without sin," yet they always found fault with him, and loaded him with all manner of accusations. The same kind of prejudice still operates in the minds of many, especially against religious characters; so that if a person be only branded with some opprobrious name, it shall be sufficient to degrade him in their eyes, and to give validity to every calumny that malice can invent. Indeed where religion is out of the question, such "evil surmisings" frequently arise; and a mere look, or motion, or word, that was perfectly innocent, shall be construed into a grievous offence, and be made an occasion of vehement indignation. That such judgment as this is wrong, needs no proof: it is too palpable a violation of the golden rule to admit of the smallest defence. Happy would it be if religious people themselves were not too often blameable on this account. They are but too prone to lay a stress on matters of indifference, and to condemn those who differ from them, as severely as if their practice were ever so criminal. But, however this conduct be cloked with a plea of religion, it is most hateful in itself, most injurious to the Church, and most offensive to Godⁱ.

But further, if our judgment have some foundation, yet is it faulty, if it be rash. We should give to every person an opportunity of assigning the reasons of his own conduct. It is the motive which chiefly stamps the quality of an action; and, till we have ascertained the principle from which any thing proceeded, we never can form a proper estimate respecting it. What injustice was there in the construction which Michal put on the conduct of David when he danced before the ark^k? Had she waited till she was informed respecting the reason of his gestures, which appeared to her in such an unfavourable light, she would have seen cause rather to adore God for him, than to load him with such bitter reproaches. On the other hand,
the

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 3. Col. ii. 16.

^k 2 Sam. vi. 16, 20.

the benefit resulting from inquiry may be seen in the termination of the cause between the Reubenites and the other tribes, on the subject of raising an altar on the side of Jordan. Had not inquiry been made into the reasons of that act, thousands of lives would have been lost in causeless warfare: whereas, on an explanation of the matter, the act was approved, and every heart was filled with joy¹. A similar effect was produced by Peter's explanation of his reasons for going to eat with uncircumcised Gentiles^m. The law of Moses, and even the Roman law, required, that no man should be condemned unheardⁿ: and certainly the same equitable rule is proper to be observed by us also^o.

• It is possible, however, that where we have cause for censure, our judgment may be too severe. The act which we condemn may have been wrong, and the principle may have been wrong also; but yet there may have been many circumstances to palliate the fault; and, if we do not take them into consideration, we shall load the offender with an unmerited degree of blame. In like manner, if because of a single *act* we impute to him an *habit* of any sin; or if because one or two persons have done any thing amiss, we impute blame to all the body or party to which they belong; this is a most unjustifiable severity, though, alas! it is but too common. It was in this manner that David's enemies acted, when they made his sin an occasion of condemning religion altogether, and of "blaspheming the very name of that God" whom he professed to serve. And the Apostle tells us, that such would be the effect of misconduct in religious persons, whether servants or others, that "the way of truth would be evil spoken of," and that "the name of God and his doctrine would be blasphemed^p." But the persons who indulge such unhallowed tempers will ultimately be the victims of their own severity.]

Such are the limits of the prohibition before us. Let us now proceed to notice,

II. The considerations with which it is enforced—

There is frequently, though not always, a visible correspondence between the work and the reward of men, even in this life. "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful," says the Psalmist; "and

¹ Josh. xxii. 9—34.

^m Acts xi. 2, 3, 4, 18.

ⁿ John vii. 51. Acts xxv. 16.

^o John vii. 23, 24.

^p 1 Tim. vi. 1. Tit. ii. 5.

“and with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward^q.” In the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount we have many expressions to the same effect. Now this consideration should operate to guard us against indulging uncharitable censures: for if we do, we may expect,

1. A *similar* recompence from man—

[People are invariably grieved when they are loaded with unmerited blame: and though they may not have it in their power to punish the injurious person in any other way, they will almost universally repay him, measure for measure, according to his desert. This is a species of revenge which every man has within his own reach, and can indulge without much danger of reprisal. Accordingly we find, that a censorious and uncharitable man, though listened to on account of the fondness which all men have for scandal, is yet disliked and dreaded by the neighbourhood in which he dwells; because the very persons who listen to his censures expect that they themselves in their turn shall be the objects of his invective. A man that is kind and amiable, and ready to make allowance for the frailties of others, will usually find reciprocal kindness at the hands of others: but the harsh, uncharitable, censorious person has little to expect but merited hatred and general condemnation. If, like Adoni-bezek, we exercise wanton cruelty towards men, we cannot hope for much mercy when we fall into their power^r. We do not indeed justify this kind of recrimination, because it is the duty of all to render good for evil; blessing for cursing: but, where Divine grace has not subdued the vindictive principle, men will “measure to us according as we mete to them.”]

2. A *suitable* recompence from God—

[God considers the sin of censoriousness in a far different light from that in which it is generally viewed. He regards it as an invasion of his right, and an usurpation of his prerogative: and the indignation with which he addresses those who presume to judge their brethren, is perhaps as marked as any that is expressed on any occasion whatever: “He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth

^q Ps. xviii. 25, 26.

^r Judg. i. 7.

judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" So again by another Apostle, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." "Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? We shall all stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. Let us not therefore judge one another any more^t." "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense" good for evil unto men according to their conduct towards others^u; and these are solemn warnings; and, if we will not attend to them, we shall disobey them at our peril: for the express determination of God is this, "He shall have judgment without mercy who hath shewed no mercy^x."]

ADVICE—

1. Search out diligently your own frailties—

[Those who are most inattentive to their own faults, are most observant of the faults of others, and most harsh in passing censures upon them. If we did but see the numberless evils that we have committed, and the base motives by which our more specious actions have been defiled, we should blush and be confounded before God; and, like those who accused the adulterous woman before our Lord, should find other employment than that of casting stones at others^y.]

2. Consider what mercy you have received at the Saviour's hands—

[How justly might he have left you, as he did the fallen angels, to receive the due reward of your sins! Yet, instead of that, he pitied your state; he came down from heaven in order to apply a remedy; he even shed his own precious blood, to wash away your guilt, and to cover it from the sight of an offended God. Go now, with this mercy before your eyes, and gratify your spleen in censuring and condemning your fellow-creatures. No; you cannot do it, if your minds be suitably impressed with the mercy you have received. Go then, and imitate your Lord; and exercise that "charity that shall cover a multitude of sins."]

3. Cultivate a spirit of love towards all mankind—

[See

^s Jam. iv. 11, 12.

^t Rom. xiv. 4, 10, 13.

^u 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

^x Jam. ii. 13.

^y John viii. 9.

[See how you are accustomed to act towards those of your own family, or of your own party: how ready are you to veil or to extenuate their faults! Think also how tender you are towards your own faults; and how ingenious in finding excuses for any thing which you have done amiss. Deal thus then with all mankind: regard them all as your friends, and love them as yourself. Only think what, in a change of circumstances, you would judge it right for them to do to you, and let that be the rule of your conduct towards them. Would you have them manifest towards you the "love that believeth all things and hopeth all things?" exercise it towards them. Where their conduct will admit of a favourable construction, fail not to view it on the charitable side: and where necessity compels you to condemn, still cast a veil of love over their transgressions, and hide them, as far as the rights of justice, and the good of the community will permit. If judged yourselves, "let it be a small matter to you to be judged of man's judgment:" and be content to leave both yourselves and others to the judgment of a righteous God^z.]

^z 1 Cor. iv. 3—5.

DCXCVII.

CAUTION TO BE USED IN REPROVING.

Matt. vii. 6. *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

IN the holy Scriptures there are not only such directions as are necessary for the saving of the soul, but such also as are of a prudential nature, calculated for the rectifying of our judgment, and the regulating of our conduct, in less important matters. A pious person would obtain salvation, though he should not be discreet in his mode of communicating instruction or reproof to others. But it is desirable that "the man of God should be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works:" and therefore he should attend as well to those admonitions which are of secondary importance, as to those which relate to the fundamental points

points of faith or practice. The words before us are connected with the prohibition respecting the judging of others. To judge others uncharitably will expose us to similar treatment from them, as well as to the displeasure of Almighty God. Before we presume to judge others at all, we ought to be diligent in searching out and amending our own faults; without which we are but ill qualified to reprove the faults of others. We ought also to consider the state of the person whom we undertake to reprove: for if he be hardened in his wickedness, and disposed to resent our well-meant endeavours, it will be more prudent to let him alone, and to wait for some season when we may speak to him with a better prospect of success. Such is the import of the caution in our text; from whence we may observe,

I. That religious instruction is often most unworthily received—

The value of religious instruction is but little known—

[Education in general is esteemed one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy; nor is any sacrifice, whether of time or money, deemed too great for the obtaining of the benefits arising from it. A richly-furnished mind, a cultivated taste, a polished manner, are distinctions which the richer part of the community particularly affect: and *they* are most envied who possess in the highest measure such accomplishments. But Divine knowledge is considered as of little worth: though it would *enrich* the soul beyond all conception, and *adorn* it with all the most amiable graces, and is therefore most fully characterized by the name of “pearls,” yet has it no beauty, no excellency, in the eyes of carnal men: the generality are as insensible of its value as swine are of the value of pearls, which they would “trample under their feet” as mire and dirt. Of this however we may be assured, that instruction, even though it be in a way of reproof, lays us under the deepest obligation to him who gives it^a.]

Many, instead of being pleased, are only irritated and offended at it—

[Nothing

^a Prov. xxv. 11, 12.

[Nothing under heaven has ever given more offence than this. Men may utter lewdness and blasphemy, and create but little disgust: but let them bear their testimony against sin, or proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, and instantly an indignation is excited in every bosom. In the House of God indeed a certain licence is allowed, provided the preacher be not too faithful: but in a private company the mention of such things is considered as a death-blow to social comfort, and is reprobated as an insufferable nuisance. Even in the public Ministry those who "labour with fidelity in the word and doctrine" are not unfrequently treated with every species of indignity. No name is too odious for them to bear, no opposition too violent to be raised against them.

It is supposed indeed by some, that the offence excited by Ministers arises from the erroneousness of their statements, or the injudiciousness of their manner. But what then shall we say to the treatment which Christ and his Apostles met with? Did our blessed Lord want any qualification that could recommend his doctrine? Did he not exhibit "the meekness of wisdom," and "speak as never man spake?" And was not Paul guided and instructed by God himself in his ministrations? Yet were both he and his Divine Master represented as babblers and deceivers; and one cry was raised against them both, "Away with them; it is not fit that they should live."

Nor is it more against the *doctrines* of Christianity that this prejudice exists, than it does against its *practice*. The doctrine of "Christ crucified is still to some a stumbling-block, and to others foolishness:" and the same anger that rankled in the bosoms of Herod and Herodias against John, who condemned their incestuous connexion, is called forth at this time against any one who shall condemn the customs of the world^b. Our Lord's words may still be used by all his faithful followers, "The world hateth me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil^c." Doubtless the inveteracy of wicked men will shew itself in different ways and different degrees, according to the different circumstances under which it is called forth: but no times or circumstances have ever superseded the necessity of attending to the caution in the text: there
ever

^b It is said of Herodias, ἐνέχεν αὐτῷ, which we translate "She had a quarrel against him;" but the idea seems to be, "She fastened on him, like a dog," that would tear him to pieces. Mark vi. 19.

^c John vii. 7.

ever have been multitudes who would take offence at the kindest efforts for their welfare^d, and, like ferocious "dogs, would turn again and rend you." Reprove iniquity, and you will still be deemed "the troublers of Israel;" and those who are reprov'd will say of you, "I hate Micaiah, for he doth not speak good of me, but evil."]

From this aversion which men feel to religious instruction, it appears,

II. That great caution is to be used in administering it—

The direction in our text was given to the whole multitude of those who heard our Lord's discourse; and therefore may be considered as applicable,

1. To Ministers—

[Though it is not to be confined to them, it does not exclude them. Doubtless where numbers of persons are assembled to hear the word of God, it is not possible to suit oneself to the disposition and taste of every individual. The rule which God himself has laid down must in such cases be followed: "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully^e." A Minister must "warn men, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear:" he must "commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God," "keeping back nothing that is profitable unto them," but "declaring unto them the whole counsel of God." Still, however, the caution in the text is necessary for him. He should consider the state of his hearers, and should adapt his discourses to their necessities. Our blessed Lord, knowing how full of prejudice the Jews were, "spake the word to them in parables, *as they were able to hear it.*" In like manner, though we must not seek the applause of man, (for "if we please men, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ;") yet we should endeavour to "please all men for their good to edification:" we should argue with them on principles which they acknowledge; we should be content to give "milk to babes," and to reserve the "strong meat" for such as are able to digest it. We should pay attention to every thing that may lessen prejudice and conciliate regard: and, though we must not affect "the wisdom of words, which would only make void the cross of Christ," we should "search out acceptable words," and be especially careful to "speak the truth in love."

^d Prov. ix. 7, 8.

^e Jer. xxiii. 28.

love." Our great object should be, not to "deliver our own souls," (though doubtless we must be careful to do that,) but principally to "win the souls" of others.]

2. To Christians in general—

[As "men do not light a candle, to put it under a bed or under a bushel, but to give light to those who are in the house," so God, when he illuminates any soul, expects that the light he has imparted should be diffused for the good of others. But in endeavouring to instruct others, we should consider the time, the manner, the measure of instruction, that will be most likely to insure success. In particular, we should not press matters when our exhortations are contemned as foolish, or resented as injurious. Not that our concern should be about *ourselves*, as though we feared either the contempt of men, or their resentment; but we should be afraid of hardening *them*, and thereby increasing their guilt and condemnation. As to *ourselves*, we should gladly "suffer all things for the elect's sake;" but for *them* we should "weep, as it were, in secret places^f," and "gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly we love them the less we be loved." If, indeed, after all our labour, we find that our efforts are only rejected by them with disdain, we may then with propriety leave them to themselves, and, like the Apostles, bestow our attention on more hopeful subjects^g. As the priests imparted of the holy food to every member of their families, but gave none of it to dogs, so may you give your holy things to others, and withhold it from those who have shewn themselves so unworthy of it.]

We will now APPLY the subject,

1. To those who are strangers to the truth—

[From the indifference which is usually shewn to Divine things, it is evident that the value of religious knowledge is but little known. If we could inform persons how to restore their health, or how to recover an estate, or how to obtain any great temporal benefit, they would hear us gladly, and follow our advice with thankfulness: but when we speak of spiritual benefits, they have no ears to hear, no hearts to understand: they are ready to say to us, as the demoniac to Christ, "Art thou come to torment us before our time?" But let it not be so with you. Think in what light God represents such conduct^h——— what regret you will hereafter feelⁱ——— and what augmented punishment

^f Jer. xiii. 17. ^g Acts xiii. 45, 46. 2 Chron. xxv. 14—16.

^h Prov. xii. 1. & xv. 31, 32.

ⁱ Prov. v. 12, 13.

punishment you will endure^k — — — And may God “open your hearts, that you may attend to the things” that belong unto your peace, before they be for ever hid from your eyes!]

2. To those who know it—

[Whilst we exhort you to be cautious in admonishing others, we would caution you also against being soon discouraged. Think not every one assimilated to dogs or swine because he resists the truth for a season; but give “line upon line, and precept upon precept,” and “instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, by whom they have been led captive at his will.”

And whilst you take upon you to admonish others, be willing to receive admonition also yourselves. It is not every religious professor that is so open to conviction as he ought to be^l, and that will receive reproof like David, esteeming it as “an excellent oil, that shall not break his head^m.” Watch over your own spirit, therefore, and exemplify in yourselves the conduct you require in others.]

^k Matt. x. 14, 15.

^l Gal. iv. 16.

^m Ps. cxli. 5.

DCXCVIII.

THE IMPORTANCE AND EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Matt. vii. 7, 8. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.*

WE need not look for a connexion in every part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount; because the account of it which we have in this Gospel is nothing more than an epitome, in which only the principal heads, together with some important sayings, are recorded. But, if we suppose the words of our text to arise from what has just preceded them, the connexion may easily be found. The commands, to abstain from all uncharitable judgment, and to be intent rather on searching out and removing our own imperfections, and,
even

even when the faults of our neighbour are most glaring, to exercise much prudence and caution in reproving him; these commands, I say, are difficult to be obeyed: and therefore our Lord encourages us by the consideration, that we may obtain by prayer whatever wisdom or strength we may stand in need of. The import of the text, however, will be the same, whether we take it as detached from the preceding context, or as connected with it: and it will naturally lead us to set before you the *nature*, the *importance*, and the *efficacy* of prayer.

I. Its nature—

Prayer is not indeed defined in the words before us; but we may collect from the different terms by which it is designated, what are its inseparable attendants and its characteristic marks:

1. Earnest desires—

[The words, “ask,” “seek,” “knock,” must certainly imply a solicitude to obtain some specific object. Now this is the very life and essence of prayer. It is not the posture of the body, or a repeating of any words, either with or without a form, that can be called prayer; but a prostration of the soul before God, accompanied with an ardent desire of acceptance with him. We may confess our vileness in the most humiliating terms, or petition for mercy with the most suitable pleas, or render thanks to God in copious and devout acknowledgments; and yet, if our hearts have not felt what our lips have uttered, we have offered no acceptable service to God: “we have worshipped him in vain, because we have drawn nigh to him with our lips when our hearts were far from him.” Desires in the soul will be accounted as prayer, though not expressed in words; but words without desires are no better than a solemn mockery.]

2. Persevering endeavours—

[A mere exclamation under an impression of terror cannot be considered as prayer: prayer imports such a desire after Divine blessings as engages us in the pursuit of them from day to day: and this also is intimated in the very terms of our text. “Asking” only is not prayer, unless

* Isai. xxvi. 8, 9. Ps. xxxviii. 9. Rom. viii. 26.

unless we “seek” also for the things in God’s appointed way: nor is “seeking” sufficient, if we do not, like persons anxious to obtain an answer, continue “knocking” at the door of Mercy. We do not indeed deny but that a prayer may be *offered* by one who speedily turns back again from God; but it is not *accepted*; and it is of *acceptable* prayer that we speak; for nothing else deserves the name of prayer. Whatever therefore a person may do on some particular occasion, he prays not to any good purpose, unless he “set his face” determinately to seek after God, and to obtain from him those daily supplies of mercy and grace which his soul needeth. Hence the command of God is, “Pray without ceasing;” “continue instant in prayer;” “pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance^b.”]

3. Humble expectation—

[Here again the terms of our text afford us a correct idea of the duty of prayer. It is evident that when a person “asks,” it is with some hope of receiving; and when he “seeks,” he has some prospect of finding; and if he “knock” at a door, it is with some expectation that it shall be opened to him. Now this, beyond every thing else, marks the true character of prayer. “In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee,” says the Psalmist, “and will *look up*^c,” that is, I will look up in expectation of receiving an answer to my prayers. It is to the prayer of faith that the promise of an answer is given: “Whatsoever ye shall ask, *believing*, ye shall receive.” Prayer destitute of this qualification is declared to be of no avail whatever: the man that offers it “must not think of receiving any thing from the Lord^d.” Hence the true and acceptable suppliant is distinguished as “looking unto God as a servant does to the hand of his master^e,” and as “waiting upon God for his salvation^f.”]

The nature of prayer being explained from the text, we proceed to notice,

II. Its importance—

[We cannot but observe throughout the whole text the inseparable connexion between the means and the end. It is thought by many that it is unnecessary to pray; because God, being omniscient, stands in no need of information from us; and being of his own nature inclined to mercy, he needs not our importunity to prevail upon him.

But

^b Eph. vi. 18.

^c Ps. cxxiii. 2.

^e Ps. v. 3.

^f Ps. cxxx. 5, 6.

^d Jam. i. 5—7.

But these objections betray an utter ignorance of the intent of prayer. Prayer is not intended to give information to God, but to impress our own minds with a sense of our dependence upon him, and to give him glory as the only fountain of all our benefits. Moreover, prayer, though often represented as prevailing with God, is not designed to dispose him to any thing to which he was before averse; but only to bring our souls to such a state, as may prepare us for a worthy reception of those blessings which God has previously determined to bestow. Though, therefore, prayer does not answer, nor is intended to answer, the ends which ignorant persons are ready to suppose, it does answer the most valuable ends; which are intimately connected with the salvation of our souls.

But we will suppose that there were no connexion whatever between the means and the end; still, if God has united them, it does not become us to put them asunder; nor can we ever expect the Divine blessing, if we attempt to separate them. Moses was commanded to take his stick, or rod, and with that to work miracles in Egypt. What would he have wrought, if, in contempt of such means, he had left his rod behind him? The Israelites were commanded to march round Jericho on seven successive days, and then to blow with rams' horns. Suppose they had disregarded these means on account of their inadequacy to produce any important result, would the walls of Jericho have fallen down? Or if Naaman had persisted in preferring the waters of Abana and Pharpar to those of Jordan, would he have been healed of his leprosy? Thus then, whether prayer have any proper effect or not, we must use it as God's ordinance; and if we will not use it, we shall infallibly lose those blessings, which, in the use of the appointed means, we might otherwise attain. True, it is said of the Gentiles, that "God was found of them that sought him not;" but this refers only to their Heathen state: for none ever ultimately found him, who did not walk with him in the daily exercise of faith and prayer: nor can there be found in all the Sacred Volume one single word that justifies a hope of obtaining any thing at God's hands in the neglect of this sacred duty^s.]

On the contrary, when prayer is offered aright, the whole Inspired Volume attests,

III. Its efficacy—

[Nothing can be more express than the declarations of our text on this subject. The repetition of them is intended

tended to assure us that no man shall ever “seek God’s face in vain.” It is of importance to observe, that in the promises before us there is no limitation whatever, either as to the person asking or the blessing desired. A person may have been as wicked as Manasseh himself, yet shall he not be cast out, provided he come to God with unfeigned penitence *in the name of Jesus Christ*. It must be remembered, that, since the coming of Christ, it is indispensably necessary that we should offer all our petitions *in his name*. *This*, in fact, was done even under the Jewish dispensation: for every penitent was obliged to put his hand upon the head of his sacrifice; and, when the Jews were in captivity, and consequently were unable to offer sacrifices, they must look towards the Temple; which was a distinguished type of Christ, “in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Let but our prayers be offered in an humble dependence on the sacrifice and intercession of Jesus Christ, and they shall assuredly prevail. God may not indeed answer us immediately; and, it may be, that he may not grant the precise thing which we pray for; but he will answer in the best *time*, and in the best *manner*, granting that which eventually will be most conducive to his own glory and to our good. David and the Canaanitish woman were suffered to wait for the blessings they desired^h; and St. Paul, yea and Christ himself too, were answered, not so much according to the letter, as according to the spirit of their petitionsⁱ. But if we tarry the Lord’s leisure, we may be as “*confident*” of an answer to our prayers, as of our own existence^k.]

In this subject we may find abundant matter,

1. For reproof—

[How many have never gone beyond the mere forms of prayer; and remain unmoved even when their self-deceit and hypocrisy are thus plainly set before them! How astonishing is this! Methinks, if God had appointed only one hour in a man’s life, wherein he should be at liberty to avail himself of the gracious promises in the text, one would suppose that the whole universe should not be able to divert his attention from this sacred duty: he would long for the appointed season to arrive; he would meditate beforehand on every thing which he could desire to obtain; and he would employ every moment of the prescribed time in most importunate supplications. So, I say, we might suppose; but experience proves, that, notwithstanding there

is

^h Ps. xl. 1—3. & lxix. 3. Matt. xv. 22—27.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. Heb. v. 7.

^k 1 John v. 14, 15.

is not a single hour in our whole lives wherein we may not avail ourselves of this privilege, the generality have never found one single hour for that holy employment. But would it be thus if God were for one hour to allow this privilege to those that are shut up in hell? If the doors of hell might be opened for their escape, would *they* neglect to “knock?” If all the blessings of grace and glory might be obtained by them, would *they* neglect to “ask.” O then let us “seek the Lord whilst he is *near* ; let us call upon him, whilst he *may be found*.” Think what a bitter reflection it will be in the eternal world, that we might have escaped the miseries of hell, and obtained the glory of heaven, by the exercise of humble and believing prayer, and we would not : we did not regard either the one or the other¹ as worth asking for. O that we may now be convinced of our folly, and not be left to bewail it to all eternity !]

2. For encouragement:—

[If God had bidden us do some great thing to obtain his favour, we should have been ready to do it. The poor, benighted Heathen, what pains and penances do not *they* undergo to obtain the favour of their gods! Yet no such things are required of *us* : *we* have nothing to do, but to “ask, and seek, and knock.” Surely we should rejoice in so great a privilege, and determine to “take the kingdom of heaven by the holy violence” of faith and prayer.

But some are discouraged, because they cannot pray with any fluency or enlargement of heart. Let not this however distress the minds of any. It is *humility*, and not *fluency*, that makes our prayers acceptable : and many a person who can only seek the Lord with sighs, and groans, and tears, will find acceptance with him, whilst others, who are admired by men, or filled with self-complacency, will be rejected. Never, from the foundation of the world, was there a better prayer than that of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

But some are discouraged because they have prayed long without receiving any answer to their prayers. Let not, however, any despond on this account. God may have answered them, though not precisely in the way that they expected : and the very continuance of their prayers is an evidence that they have not prayed in vain. It is evident at least that God has given them his Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of grace and of supplication ; and this is a *pledge* and *earnest* of all other blessings which they stand in need of. Let them “tarry the Lord’s leisure, and he will comfort their hearts ;” “let them wait, I say, upon the Lord !”]

¹ See Isai. xl. 30, 31. exemplified by Luke xi. 1—4. & xviii. 1—7.

DCXCIX.

THE DOING AS WE WOULD BE DONE UNTO.

Matt. vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*

GOD is graciously pleased on some occasions to take those things which are good in men, for the purpose of illustrating his own ineffable and unbounded goodness. There is scarcely to be found a mother so destitute of feeling as to "forget her sucking child, and not to have compassion on the son of her womb." Such a monster, says God, may be found: "yet will not I forget thee." So, in the words before the text, we are told, that, "evil" as men are, there exists not a father so cruel as to give his child a stone or a serpent, when importuned by him for the food that is necessary for his subsistence: from whence this inference is made; "How much more shall your heavenly Father give good things unto them that ask him." Such inferences are just and legitimate to a certain extent: but they must not be pressed too far. We must not presume to argue, as many infidels have done, "that because a benevolent *man* would not punish his enemy to all eternity, therefore *God* will not:" for there is no parallel between the cases; nor are God's actions to be measured by such a standard: his written word will be the rule of his procedure; and all conclusions that contradict that will prove delusive at the last. But though we cannot always argue from what man would do to what we may expect from God, we may safely, and in all cases, infer, from the superabundant goodness of God to us, the obligation which lies on us to exercise all possible degrees of kindness to our fellow-creatures. To this thought we are led by the connexion in which our text stands with
the

* Isai. xlix. 15.

the preceding verses. The words we have just read to you are an exhortation founded on the preceding representation of the Divine goodness: and certainly the argument is exceeding strong: for, if God *in any case* condescends to make our good actions a rule of conduct to himself, much more should we make the unbiassed convictions of our own minds the rule of our conduct towards all.

The direction that is here given us, is as important as any in the whole Sacred Volume. We shall endeavour to point out,

I. Its import—

It is almost dangerous to attempt an elucidation of so plain a command, lest we only obscure, whilst we endeavour to explain it. But it is obvious that something must be supplied, in order to guard against the misconstructions which a caviller might put upon the words. The fact is, that all people do of themselves supply what is wanting in them, without being conscious that the sense which they affix to the words is the result of their own judgment, and not the strict meaning of the words themselves. I say there are two limitations which all people do, though unconsciously, assign to the words, and without which they would not be a just rule of conduct to any man: and these are,

1. That we must *exchange situations*, as it were, with the person towards whom we are about to act—

[It would be absurd to say, that we must actually conduct ourselves towards all people precisely as we would wish them to act towards us. There are a thousand menial services, which the more opulent part of the community must have done for them, and which it would be folly and madness in them to go and do for others^b. Besides, there are duties arising out of the very situations we hold; and which are not duties to any, except to persons who are so circum-

^b Though there are many kind offices which the rich *may* perform for the poor, there are many which, though required by themselves, they *cannot* do for others;—e.g. sweeping chimneys, &c.

circumstanced. Those, for instance, who are in authority, as rulers, or parents, or masters, are not called to obey their inferiors, because they desire to be obeyed by them. Were we therefore to construe the command without any limitation, we must break down all the distinctions in society, and set aside all the duties which God himself has connected with them. To prevent this, we must suppose the person to be in our situation, and ourselves in his; and then consider, what we should desire and expect from him. If, for instance, we be in authority, we should ask ourselves what treatment we should desire and expect, if we were in the place of our inferiors; and then we should act with all the kindness and condescension towards them, that we, in a change of circumstances, should expect at their hands.]

2. That we must make, not our *inclination*, but our *judgment*, the rule of our conduct—

[It is not sufficient to change places with the person towards whom we are about to act. For, if we put ourselves in the situation of a poor man, we might *wish* our rich neighbour to divide his property with us: but this is no reason why we should go and act thus: the thing is unreasonable in itself: and, however we might *wish* it, we should not for a moment think that *justice or equity required it*. So, if we were to put ourselves in the place of a convicted felon, we might *wish* the judge not to put the laws in force against us: but that is no reason why we, if sitting in the place of judgment, should not enforce and execute the laws against others. We must not consider so much what we might *wish* in such circumstances, as what we should, after full and impartial consideration, *think right*. We should think it right that the judge should investigate our cause with care, and make his decision with equity; and, on the whole, should lean to the side of mercy rather than of severity: but we could never persuade ourselves that felons should be permitted to violate the laws with impunity; because *that* would render the peaceful members of society a prey to every daring ruffian. It is evident then that we must call in the aid of *judgment*, and regulate our conduct according to its deliberate and unbiassed dictates.

With the help of these two remarks, we shall be in no danger of misinterpreting the rule before us. Indeed these limitations are so obvious, that, as we said before, they are unconsciously supplied even by the most ignorant of mankind; so that we might have waved all mention of them

them, if it had not been expedient to mark with precision the limits, which, though generally, are but indistinctly seen. In a word, the rule is this: We must consider in all cases what we, under a change of circumstances, should think it right for another to do unto us; and that must be the rule of our conduct towards him.]

Having thus considered the import of the rule, we proceed to shew,

II. Its excellence—

A greater encomium cannot be passed upon it than is in the words before us: “This is the law and ‘the prophets.” But what is implied in this commendation? and what are those particular excellencies which it holds up to our view? It intimates, that the rule is eminently distinguished for the following properties:

1. It is concise—

“The law and the prophets” constitute a very large volume; to become well acquainted with which in all its parts, requires no little expense, both of time and labour. But, vast as its circumference is, its lines all meet in this rule, as in their common centre. We speak not indeed of the *doctrinal* part of this volume, but of the *preceptive*. This limitation, like those before mentioned, is necessarily implied, though not expressed: and, if we do not bear it in mind, we shall pervert this best of principles into an occasion of the most destructive error. “The law and the prophets” have a twofold use; first, to testify of *Christ as the ground of our hopes*^c; and next, to state the *law as the measure of our duties*^d. To understand the commendation given to this rule as extending to the law and the prophets in the former sense, would annihilate the whole Gospel, and make the death of Christ of no avail. We must therefore understand our Lord as speaking of the law and the prophets only so far as they contain a rule of life. Moreover, when speaking of them expressly in this view, he comprehends the law under two great commandments, The love of God, and The love of our neighbour; and then he adds, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets^e.” But it is only to this second commandment that the rule in our text refers; and consequently, when we speak of the rule as compre-

^c Rom. iii. 21, 22.

^d Matt. xxii. 40.

^e ib. 36—40.

hending the law and the prophets, we must be considered as limiting our assertion not only to the *preceptive* part of the law, in opposition to the *doctrinal*; but to *that part* of the preceptive code *which contains our duty to our neighbour*. Let it be remembered, however, that there is not a page of the Sacred Volume which is not replete with instruction upon this point; and that this short sentence in my text is a summary of the whole.

Now if, on every occasion, we had to search the Sacred Volume for some precept directly to our point, the opportunities of acting would be passed before we had found such a direction as would be satisfactory to our minds. This would be the case even with those who were most conversant with the Sacred Writings, and much more with those whose time is almost entirely occupied with temporal concerns. But behold, here is a summary, so short, that it is easily remembered; so simple, that it is easily understood; so suited to all occasions, that it is easily applied, by any person, and at any time. Methinks this rule, to a Christian, is like the compass to a mariner. Were the master of a ship destitute of any other means, of directing his vessel, except those afforded him by the heavenly bodies, he might often be steering a very different course from that which he designed to take: but, by the help of the compass, the most illiterate sailor may know which way to steer: that little portable contrivance will direct him, whether by day or night, whether in a calm or tempest, and that too in every climate under heaven. Precisely thus it is with the Christian: there would be many times and occasions, when, if destitute of this rule, he would not know how to conduct himself aright: but, by the help of this, the most ignorant cannot lose his way: his path in every situation is made plain by it; and the “way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein^f.”]

2. It is comprehensive—

“The law and the prophets” contain directions proper for every person, in every rank, under every situation and circumstance in which he can possibly be placed. Nor is this rule at all less extensive: it will direct the king on his throne no less than the meanest subject in his dominions. There is not any single act, relating either to justice and equity, or to kindness and charity, or even to common decency

^f Compare Isai. xxxv. 8. with Prov. viii. 9. & Hos. xiv. 9.; and mark the difference between those who have, and those who have not, the compass.

decency and civility, which it does not equally embrace, and for which it does not provide a sufficient directory.

Under the Jewish dispensation, the high priest had an opportunity of ascertaining the mind and will of God by means of his breast-plate. What the *Urim and Thummim* was, or how it conveyed information to the high priest, is not positively known: but that God did make use of it in some way to convey to him the knowledge of his will, is certain: nor was there any subject whereon God would not have given him instruction, if he had sought it in a becoming manner. Now we are repeatedly told in the New Testament, that all true Christians are both “kings and priests unto God:” and one of the most distinguished privileges which, as Christians, we enjoy, is a liberty of access to God, every one of us for ourselves, without the intervention of any human Being, and a permission to seek direction from him on every occasion. And has not God furnished us with the *Urim and Thummim*? Yes, he has: this very rule he has given us to carry, as it were, upon our breasts, that it may instruct us in every part of our duty. We may say respecting it, as Moses says of the Gospel salvation, “We need not go up to heaven, to bring it down from above; nor descend into the deep, to bring it up from beneath; but the word is nigh us, even in our mouth and in our hearts.” Wherever we are, we need only set ourselves in the presence of God, and, with humble supplications to him, inspect our own bosoms, to see what light this rule will afford us; and we shall assuredly be guided in the right way. Whether we be rich or poor, learned or unlearned, and whether the subject be more or less important, no difference shall be made: if the point relate to states and kingdoms, or if it concern only the smallest branch of moral duty to an individual, it shall equally be made known to us: and if, after that, we err, the error will not proceed from any defect in the rule itself, but from a want of a more perfect discernment of it, or a more just application of it to the point before us.]

3. It is complete—

[What can be added to “the law and the prophets” to make them more complete? Vain would be the attempt either of men or angels to find in them one single flaw or defect: for whilst they comprehend every species of duty, they supply at the same time every motive for the performance of it: “The word of the Lord is perfect.”

The

The same may be said also of the rule before us. No created wisdom can improve it: no man can find in it any thing either superfluous or defective. Its comprehensiveness and conciseness we have before spoken of: and we may now notice, what indeed still more clearly displays its excellence, its singular operation on the human mind, not merely as a light to direct us in the path we should go, but as an incentive to us to walk in it.

The mode in which this rule operates upon us is this: *it takes the most corrupt principle of the human heart, even that root of bitterness from whence every species of injustice springs; it suspends all the operations of that principle on the side of evil, and constrains it to become a powerful advocate of virtue.* Selfishness is the real source of all those evils and calamities which men bring on each other. It is to this principle that we must trace the wars of contending nations, the discord of families, the injustice, the fraud, and all the other evils that are found in the transactions of individuals. From this principle it is, that men are universally disposed to expect too much, and to concede too little. Now this rule, requiring us to put ourselves in the place of him towards whom we are about to act, cuts off at once all scope for the exercise of this principle in our own cause, and enlists it into the service of our neighbour; thereby inclining us as much to favour him, as it would otherwise have inclined us to benefit ourselves: at the same time it marks so strongly the reasonableness of true benevolence, as makes us abhor the thought of acting in opposition to it. I may further add too, that whilst this rule operates thus as a stimulus to virtue, a consciousness of having acted agreeably to it is one of the richest rewards that man can enjoy on earth: if a man fail of accomplishing his benevolent purposes, he has a recompence in his own bosom from a sense that he has acted right himself: and, if he attain his end, he has a double recompence, the testimony of a good conscience, and the joy of seeing that he has not laboured in vain. Say then, whether this be not justly called *the golden rule*? Surely, whether we consider the mode of its operation, or its peculiar efficacy, or the delight that invariably proceeds from conforming to it, its value is inestimable; nor can any terms be too strong in commendation of it.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. The *scope* and *intent* of true religion—

[It is surprising what a jealousy prevails in the minds of men with respect to this. Talk of religion, and especially of

of Christ, and of "the righteousness which is of God by faith in him, unto all, and upon all them that believe;" and a doubt immediately arises, whether you are not an enemy to good works: this is declared to be the proper tendency of such sentiments; and all manner of stories are raked together to countenance the idea. As for those who deny that "the law and the prophets" testify of Christ, and point him out as the only source of "righteousness and strength," we shall leave them to settle the matter with the apostle Paul, and with the standard writings of the established Church. We shall at present notice those only who are so fearful about the interests of morality. Now we assert, that, however strongly the doctrine of justification by faith be maintained from "the law and the prophets," no man that pays the smallest deference to their testimony can fail to insist upon good works. When we read in one part, that "the love of God and of our neighbour are the two great commandments, on which hang all the law and the prophets;" and in another part, that "the doing as we would be done unto, is (in substance) "the law and the prophets;" we are amazed that any human Being should be found, who denies the necessity of good works; or that people should be so credulous as to impute this sentiment to all who embrace the doctrine of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. Let the matter be investigated: let it be seen whether Paul was an enemy to good works; whether the great body of our English Reformers were enemies to good works: let us examine the writings of those who now uphold the same doctrine, and see whether *they* neglect to inculcate and encourage good works. Truly, if people were not blinded by prejudice, they would see that one half at least of the obloquy that falls upon those who are contemptuously called Evangelical, is on account of the strictness of their lives and the holiness of their deportment. But, waving all these considerations, this at least is plain, that, whatever fault there may be in any set of men, "the law and the prophets" stand unimpeached: they, with one voice, require submission to the golden rule, and make the practice of *that* to be an indispensable test of men's regard for their testimony. Let this then sink down into our ears; let it be remembered, that the very Scriptures, which inculcate most forcibly the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, inculcate also a most exalted morality. The Gospel never did, nor ever will, bring any person to salvation in the way of *sin*; it is in the way of holiness only, and of a very exalted degree of

^h Rom. x. 4. Isai. xlv. 24. Jer. xxiii. 6.

of holiness too, that any man can attain the salvation of the Gospel. Not that holiness will save him; *it is the blood and righteousness of Christ that saves him*: nevertheless it is an universal and unalterable truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." May God write that truth on the hearts of such as disregard good works, (if any such there be;) and especially on the hearts of all who set themselves against the doctrines of salvation through unfounded prejudices against them, as being of a licentious tendency!]

2. The effect and benefit of true religion—

[This is not to be looked for in the professions, but in the practices, of men; yet not in the practice of some easy duties, such as those of generosity and kindness, but in an universal and habitual attention to the rule before us. Where Christian principles have their full operation on the mind, there this rule will be established in the heart, and be exhibited in the life. Take the conduct of the early converts to Christianity; and there you will see the precise change of which we are speaking: and their situations being peculiar, they carried the principle to the extent of selling all their possessions for the support of their poorer brethren. A still more wonderful instance we see in the apostle Paul, who, from the time of his conversion to Christianity, was willing to do or suffer any thing whereby he might facilitate the progress of the Gospel in the world. Knowing the advantages which, as a Christian, he enjoyed, he was willing even to lay down his own life, if by so doing he might bring others to a participation of them. The same change is still accomplished in the world; only it is less visible; the circumstances of the Church not calling for such a manifest display of it, and the measure of Divine grace now enjoyed by the saints being, it is to be feared, more scanty than at that period. But can any one see the effects of religion, even as it is now exhibited, and not confess its excellence? Wherever it prevails, it establishes both in the heart and life this amiable principle: it brings men to do as they would be done unto. Suppose for a moment that one single man, the present disturber of the universe¹, were impressed aright by the Gospel of Christ, and brought under the influence of this principle, how many thousands and even millions of the human race would have reason to rejoice! And, if that principle were universally prevalent, what happiness would pervade the world! Such then is the effect, and such the benefit of true religion. It only remains that we urge you all to cultivate this principle.

Let

¹ This referred to Buonaparte.

Let it not be said of any of you, He talks of faith in Christ, but he is covetous, dishonest, passionate, vindictive. Let love reign in your hearts; and whilst you profess yourselves to be "trees of righteousness, of the Lord's planting," let "the tree be known by its fruit."]

DCC.

MEN KNOWN BY THEIR FRUITS.

Matt. vii. 15—20. *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit: neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

THE greater part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount was intended to counteract the errors of the Pharisees, and the false glosses by which they had obscured the law of Moses. But, in the words before us, our Lord seems to have intended to counteract the general influence of the Pharisees. They were in high repute for sanctity among the people, even whilst they were filled with all manner of malignant passions. They pretended to have a high regard for religion; but they were, in fact, the bitterest enemies of all vital godliness. It was of great importance that the followers of Christ should know how to distinguish them: and for that purpose our Lord gave them a rule which, in its use and application, was easy, certain, and universal.

Let us consider,

I. Against whom we are here cautioned—

The term "prophets," though often applied to those who foretold future events, is often to be understood of those only, who, like common Ministers, were engaged in preaching the word of God.

Of

Of these, many were occupied in disseminating error, rather than truth; and therefore they are justly called “false prophets^a.” They were indeed, for the most part, very fair in their pretences, and specious in their appearance; and in this respect were in sheep’s clothing; but their views and designs were hostile to the best interests of the Church: they were proud, selfish, covetous, worldly, and oppressive; and when any opportunity arose of gratifying their malignant dispositions, they manifested their true nature, and shewed themselves to be no other than “ravening wolves.”

Of this kind are they,

1. Who lower the standard of the law—

[This was the constant aim of the Pharisees: they explained away the spirituality of the law, and reduced it to a mere letter. Their great object was, to reduce all religion to a few unmeaning observances. Against such persons our Lord, not only in this, but in almost all his discourses, guarded his hearers. He represented them as hypocrites, and said, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees, which is hypocrisy.” Against such also it is necessary to guard men in every age. Persons of this description often obtain considerable influence by means of their rank and office in the Church; and make little use of that influence, except to decry all serious religion. Every thing beyond their own attainments they call enthusiasm; and profligacy itself finds more favour in their eyes than true piety. Whatever therefore be their station or their influence, our Lord bids us to “beware of them.” If indeed they sustain the sacred office of Ministers, then we must “observe and do whatsoever they enjoin,” so far, at least, as it accords with the word of God. But we must not follow them one hair’s breadth beyond: we must not be led by their influence, either to reject truth, or to embrace error; but must be on our guard against them; and “follow them only so far as they themselves are followers of Christ.”]

2. Who corrupt and pervert the Gospel—

[Thus it was with the Judaizing teachers: they blended the observation of the Mosaic ritual with an alliance in the Lord Jesus Christ; and thus, in fact, destroyed the

very

^a 2 Pct. ii. 1. False prophets and false teachers are synonymous.

very foundations of the Gospel. St. Paul tells us, that they perverted the Gospel, and introduced another Gospel, which was, in truth, no Gospel at all^b: and he guards us against them with a holy vehemence, which might appear almost to border on impiety: "If any one, even though he be an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." "I repeat it," says he: "if an angel from heaven so corrupt the Gospel, let him be accursed."

But are there no such teachers in later ages? Yes; in every age of the Church they are very numerous. Men are prone to unite something of their own with the meritorious work of Christ, as a joint ground of their hope; and they are very specious in their arguments: they seem as if they had a great zeal for morality, and were only afraid of countenancing licentiousness. But, whatever be their pretences, we must be on our guard against them. Hear how pointedly the Apostle speaks: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers, beware of the concision." Beware then of all such persons, and of their fatal errors: for "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," either in whole or in part: nor "can any man lay any other foundation than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."]

3. Who distract and divide the Church—

[Many there were of this description even in the Apostolic age; men who would bring forward their own particular notions with a view to draw away disciples after them. Some would insist upon something under the name of science or philosophy^c: others would deny some of the plainest truths of Christianity^d: others would plead for a latitude in the indulgence of some particular sins^e: others would exalt one teacher or Apostle above all the rest^f. In short, they were men of an unquiet, disputatious, forward, contentious disposition^g; loving to have any kind of pre-eminence, and to raise their own credit or interest on the divisions and dissensions of the Church^h. Now, says St. Paul, "Mark men of this description, and avoid themⁱ." "Receive them not into your house," says St. John, "neither bid them God speed^k." And well may we be on our guard against them. Many of them are extremely subtle; and some would almost withstand an Apostle himself^l. But they are only wolves, yea ravening wolves too, in sheep's clothing;

^b Gal. i. 6, 7, 8, 9.

^c Col. ii. 8.

^d 2 Tim. ii. 16--18.

^e Rev. ii. 14, 15.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 4.

^g 1 Tim. vi. 3--5.

^h John iii. 9. Gal. vi. 13.

ⁱ Rom. xvi. 17.

^k 2 John ii. 10.

^l 2 Tim. iv. 15.

clothing; and though they may express much concern for the welfare of the Church, they fatten on the spoils of every fold to which they can get access^m.]

But as it may often be difficult to discern the characters of these men, our Lord lays down,

II. The rule whereby we are to judge of them—

It is a plain, acknowledged truth, that we must judge of trees by their fruit—

[No person will expect for a moment to find “grapes on a thorn, or figs on a thistle:” common sense will tell him, that every tree has its own proper productions; and that even the fruit it does bear will not be found in perfection, unless the tree itself be good. “A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit; nor can a good tree bring forth evil fruit.” The quality of the fruit will infallibly mark the quality of the tree itself. If the fruit be good, it will mark the tree to be deserving of culture and regard; but if bad, to merit nothing but excision and the fire.]

Precisely in the same manner we must judge of those who call themselves prophets of the Lord—

[Twice is it repeated, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” We should inquire, What is the fruit of their doctrine upon themselves and on their hearers? If the people themselves be proud, worldly, covetous, and despisers of real piety, we have no reason to think that they will ever produce the opposite dispositions in us. If they be resting on a wrong foundation themselves, they are not likely to build us up upon that which God has laid in Zion. If they be disputatious, contentious, ambitious of pre-eminence among their fellows, they are not calculated to be useful to us in bringing us to a meek, humble, and heavenly frame.

If our access to them be not such as to enable us to judge of their spirit and conduct, then we must endeavour to notice the effect of their doctrines upon others: and if we find that this is altogether unfavourable, we must be on our guard to prevent any evil accruing to ourselves. We may see in the holy Scriptures, what was the temper, and what the conversation, of Christ and his Apostles: and, if we find the word ministered unto us has a tendency to assimilate us to them, we may safely yield ourselves to its influence: but, if it be calculated to lower the standard

of

of real piety, and to make us rest in low attainments, we should beware lest we be led astray by it, and beg of God that nothing may ever "corrupt us from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus."

It may be said, that this will lead those who ought to be learners to put themselves in the seat of judgment, and to become judges even of their own teachers. But it must be remembered, that it is one thing to erect a tribunal for the exercising of public judgment, and another thing to form a judgment for the benefit of our own souls. The former is wrong, unless we be officially called to it: but the latter is necessary for our own salvation. We are commanded "not to believe every spirit; but to try the spirits, whether they be of God." We are told also to "prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good." But this we cannot do, unless we examine what we hear, and bring it to the unerring standard of "the word and testimony." Though, therefore, we be not qualified to lay down the law for others, we must all judge for ourselves; since on the exercise of that judgment the eternal welfare of our souls depends. And, if we feel ourselves incompetent for the work, we may apply to God for help; assured, that "the meek he will guide in judgment;" and that "a way-faring man, though a fool, shall not be permitted by him to err," in any thing that shall be necessary for the salvation of his soul.]

As a proper IMPROVEMENT of the subject before us, we would recommend to your attention the following ADVICE:

1. Take care to profit by the Ministry that you do enjoy—

[Though we must so far have our judgment exercised respecting the ministry of the word, as to determine whether its general scope be likely to profit us or not, yet, when we have reason to believe that the truth of God is proposed to us, we should not listen to it with critical ears: we should rather receive it with all humility of mind; and "receive it with meekness, as an engrafted word, able to save our souls." We should not be satisfied with understanding and approving of what we hear, but should endeavour to reduce it to practice. "If we be hearers only of the word, and not doers, we deceive-ourselves"——— Let us then look well to the effect produced on our own souls, and,
"as

“ as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby.”]

2. Judge of your own state and character by the fruits you produce—

[If we are concerned to judge of others, much more are we of ourselves : for however wise and pious our instructors may be, it will be of no use to us, unless we be pious ourselves ; nor, however erroneous they be, shall we suffer, if we be taught and sanctified by the Spirit of God. We must therefore not be contented with adopting right sentiments ; but must take care that they influence us in a becoming manner. We should often bring ourselves to the touchstone of God’s word, and examine candidly what advancement we make in the Divine life : knowing assuredly, that if we be found cumberers of the ground at last, we shall be cut down and cast into the fire : but, if we have abounded in the fruits of righteousness to the glory of our God, we shall be accepted for Christ’s sake, and be acknowledged by him as good and faithful servants, who shall for ever participate his joy.]

DCCI.

THE EFFECT OF OUR LORD’S PREACHING.

Matt. vii. 28, 29. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine : for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.*

IT has been thought by many, that this which is called the Sermon on the Mount, was not delivered at one time, but is only a collection of sayings which at different times were used by our Lord. But, as our Lord went through all the cities, towns, and villages of Judea, instructing the people, it is reasonable to suppose, that he should frequently deliver the same truths in nearly the same expressions, because the same instructions were necessary for all. The repetition of them therefore, at different times, and at distant places, is no reason at all why they

they should not now have been delivered all at once, when so great a multitude was attending his ministry, and he had gone up upon a mountain for the purpose of addressing them to more advantage. Moreover, the words before us clearly shew, that this was one continued sermon; or rather, that these were the chief topics contained in it, together with the principal illustrations of them.

Having successively considered all the different parts of this sermon, we now come to notice,

I. The peculiar character of our Lord's preaching—²

We shall not enter upon the subject of his ministry at large, but confine our attention to the discourse before us; which, both in the matter and in the manner, appears to have been well calculated to make a deep impression on his audience.

The things with which they appear to have been particularly affected, were,

1. His wisdom—

[There was an astonishing depth in all that he spoke. His *knowledge of the Divine law* was such, as infinitely surpassed all that even their most eminent prophets had ever manifested. David had acknowledged his inability to explore its depth: "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad." But the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of it were open to the view of Jesus, who saw it in all its spirituality, and in its utmost perfection. He was *able to expose* and refute all the *false glosses* with which their most learned teachers had obscured the law; and to set it forth as reaching, no less to the thoughts and intents of the heart than to the most open actions of the life.

There was also a *luminousness in his statements*, which, like the light of the sun, carried its own evidence along with it. And his *illustrations* were so *apt*, so easy, so familiar, so convincing, that every one who was open to conviction was constrained to assent to every word he spoke. Nor did he ever, like the Scribes, dwell upon matters that were altogether useless and unedifying; but he was *always on subjects of prime importance*, the knowledge of which

which was necessary for the salvation of the soul. In a word, as at an early period of his life the Doctors in the Temple "were astonished at his understanding and answers," so now, on this and many subsequent occasions, his hearers wondered, "How knoweth this man letters, (the Scriptures), having never learned," or had a learned education?]

2. His faithfulness—

[He flattered not the people by countenancing for a moment their expectation of a temporal Messiah, but shewed the spiritual nature of that kingdom which he was come to establish. Moreover, in his reproofs he spared not any: the greatest and the wisest among the people were rather the more exposed to his censures, on account of the influence which they exerted over the minds of others. The fallacy of their reasonings, the defectiveness of their morals, and the hypocrisy of their religious acts, (their alms, their prayers, their fastings,) were held up to universal reprobation; and all the multitude were warned plainly, that "unless their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." They were warned too that they must yield a cordial and unreserved obedience to his instructions; that the retaining of any bosom lust would infallibly destroy their souls for ever; that every sinful affection, though dear as a right eye, or apparently necessary as a right hand, must be cut off; or else they would assuredly take their portion "in hell-fire."

These were plain truths; not such as the people had been accustomed to hear from their teachers, who only "prophesied smooth things, or amused them with deceits:" they were such truths as commended themselves to the consciences of all, and made them feel that they were sinners before God. Every person that heard him bore him witness, that "truly he was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sin^a."]

3. His authority—

[The Scribes were in the habit of founding their instructions on their own fallacious reasonings, or on the dogmas of some of the more learned Rabbis. But our Lord appealed to no authority above his own. He reasoned indeed for the conviction of his hearers; but the ground on which he required every word of his to be received, was his own authority; "*I say unto you; I say unto you.*" In this

^a Mic. iii. 8.

this he differed from all the prophets that had gone before him: *they* delivered their messages, as from Jehovah; "Thus saith the Lord:"—but Jesus, being himself "God manifest in the flesh, assumed a right to dictate as from himself;" "Ye have heard from others" such or such a thing; but "*I* say unto you" the very reverse; and require you to receive the word on *my* authority. To this his hearers were ready to submit: for the miracles which he had already wrought without number had evinced his almighty power and Godhead, and were a standing testimony, that his every word was to be received with implicit faith and unreserved obedience.

Doubtless there were many other things conspicuous in his ministrations: his gracefulness and ease, his tenderness and compassion, his zeal and diligence, could not fail of attracting notice; but the points above specified, are those which seem more particularly adverted to in the words of our text.]

Such was the preaching of our Lord. Let us now consider,

II. The effect produced by it on his hearers—

They appear to have been exceedingly struck with his address; yet not so affected as we might have hoped. We shall endeavour to point out,

1. How far the effect was good—

[The word which we translate "astonished," does certainly imply a very deep impression made upon their minds. This impression consisted partly in *admiration*, with which they were filled; and partly in *conviction*, with which they were penetrated; a conviction of the truth, the importance, and the beneficial tendency of all he had spoken. The novelty, united with the circumstances before mentioned, made his ministry appear as superior to that of others as the effulgence of the sun is to the light of a twinkling star. One sentiment evidently pervaded the whole multitude, "Never man spake like this man." At the same time they felt in their consciences, that, if *this* was religion, they had hitherto been ignorant of it in their minds, and destitute of it in their hearts.

Now these two feelings were doubtless good, inasmuch as they argued an openness of mind, a freedom from offence, and a desire of further instruction: and accordingly we find, that, "When he came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him." But, from all that is recorded,

• we

we have no reason to conclude that the impression made upon them was altogether such as might have been wished.]

2. Wherein it was defective—

[*They should have been "pricked to their hearts" with a deep sense of their wickedness, and should have been led to cry out, like those on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do to be saved?" Without such humiliation as this, they could never be truly penitent: they never could abhor themselves, as every penitent must do, in dust and ashes.*

They should have also given up themselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ.—He required all to take up their cross and follow him: but this was effected only to a very small extent, even to the hour of his death: the whole number of his followers amounted at the last to no more than one hundred and twenty. Hence it is evident, that, whatever effects were produced on this audience, they were only transient; and, consequently, that the word preached did not profit the people, "not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."

They should have been brought to a new and heavenly life.—Every thing that falls short of this is in vain. We must "obey from the heart that form of doctrine into which we are delivered;" just as metal, that assumes the shape of the mould whereinto it is poured^b. But we see not in this audience any such tenderness of spirit, such melting of heart, such surrender of their souls, such transformation of their lives. They appear only to have been like Ezekiel's hearers, who were delighted with his oratory, but were un-influenced by his reproofs^c.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. How ineffectual is the word without the Spirit—

[If any words could of themselves convert the souls of men, surely the words of our Lord Jesus Christ would have produced this effect. But even his discourses were often as water spilled upon the ground. So it was also when his disciples preached: "Paul might plant, and Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase." The truth is, that nothing ever has been done, or ever can, for the saving of immortal souls, but by the operation of the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that quickeneth us from the dead: it is the Spirit that opens the understanding and the heart: it

^b. See Rom. vi. 17. the Greek. ^c Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

it is "the Spirit that enables us to mortify the deeds of the body," and that renews us altogether after the Divine image. When, therefore, we come up to the House of God, let us look, through the means, to Him who alone can render the means effectual for our good. Let us remember, that the ministry of Christ himself will produce no saving effects without the Spirit; and that the word, by whomsoever delivered, if accompanied with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, shall be sharper than a two-edged sword, and be more powerful than "the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces."]

2. In what a lamentable state are the generality of hearers—

[Multitudes, where the Gospel is preached with fidelity, will approve the word, and perhaps admire the preacher; but they are apt to put those feelings in the place of true conversion^d. Surely this is a point that deserves to be well considered. We should judge ourselves, not by our feelings towards the word, or towards him that ministers it to us, but by the radical and abiding effects produced upon our hearts and lives. Let it be a matter then of serious inquiry, Wherein does my reception of the word differ from that manifested by the auditors of our Lord? Perhaps I have been often struck, yea, "exceedingly struck," with admiration and conviction; but have I been brought to the exercise of deep contrition, of lively faith, of universal holiness? Know ye, Beloved, that unless the word have this effect upon you, instead of being to you "a savour of life unto life, it will be a savour of death unto death;" yea, your state will be less tolerable than even that of Sodom and Gomorrha.]

3. What reason we have for thankfulness that we possess the written word—

[Many of Christ's hearers probably regretted that they could not retain his discourse in their memory, and that they had it not in their hands for subsequent perusal. And the generality amongst us have reason to lament our inability to remember what we hear, even when the discourse embraces perhaps only a single point of that which was so diffusively treated by our Lord. But, whether this forgetfulness is our misfortune or our fault, we have this consolation at least, that the sermon of our blessed Lord is in our hands; that we may hear him preach it over to us,

as

^d Mark vi. 10. John v. 35.

* ἐξῆλθοντες αὐτοῦ.

as it were, again and again; yea, that we may even ask him to explain to us every point in it. What an advantage is this! What a value should we set upon it, if now, for the first time, his sermon were put into our hands! But alas! because it is accessible at all times, we are apt to make light of it: and not a few are blind enough to disregard it, because it refers rather to the precepts than the doctrines of the Gospel. Let us not however so slight our privileges: let us study this portion of Holy Writ with peculiar attention: and let us endeavour to get every precept wrought into our hearts, and exhibited in our lives. Then shall we be indeed improved by it, and shew forth the excellence of Christianity in all its perfection.]

DCCII.

HOW WE ARE TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

Matt. viii. 19—22. A certain Scribe came and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me: and let the dead bury their dead.

ONE would have supposed, that, in such an history as that of our Lord, none but great things would be recorded; and that smaller incidents would be passed over as unworthy of notice: but the Inspired Writers, notwithstanding an inexhaustible fund of matter presented itself to their view, and they had previously determined to be as concise as possible, were directed by God to relate many circumstances, which to us would have appeared too insignificant to be mentioned in such a work. And for this we have abundant reason to be thankful: for, had any other plan been followed, the Scriptures would have been less calculated for general use. Great events occur but rarely, and to few; whereas small circumstances arise daily and hourly; nor is there any
one

one to whom they may not profitably be applied. The short conversations recorded in the text appear of little moment; yet are they singularly instructive, and applicable to every human Being. They serve in a peculiar manner to put us on our guard against two destructive errors;—*precipitancy*, on the one hand, and *procrastination*, on the other:—they guard us, I say, against,

I. Precipitancy—

This is a common and fatal error in the Christian world—

[The Scribe here mentioned was manifestly guilty of it. He came to our Lord professing a determination, which he was but ill qualified to execute. Doubtless his intention was good: he came in a very respectful manner, and voluntarily engaged himself to become a stated follower of Christ. But it is probable that he thought his office and talents, as a Scribe, would procure him a more elevated station among the disciples: and it is evident that he expected to find his adherence to Christ rewarded with an abundance of earthly comforts. Our Lord therefore rectified his mistake, and told him, that his followers must expect no better fare than he himself had, which yet in some respects was inferior to that which the wildest animals enjoyed: for “foxes had their holes, and birds of the air their nests; whereas the Son of Man, though Lord of all, had not where to lay his head.”

The same fault obtains very commonly amongst ourselves. Multitudes take up a profession of religion upon grounds equally mistaken: they expect to find ease, and interest, and honour, as their portion here: and, because such things are promised to the Believer in a *spiritual view*, they are ready to look for them altogether in a worldly view. They see that vital religion ennobles the soul; and therefore they expect the world to estimate it according to its true value. But they are much mistaken: and]

It is of great importance that this error should be rectified—

[Before any person makes a profession of religion, it is requisite that he should consider carefully, *what duties are required of him*, and *what difficulties are to be encountered by him*. Now the duties are, not such as the Scribe apprehended; namely, to wait upon Christ in an external profession of his religion, (for we may go to the outward ordinances

ordinances with the greatest punctuality imaginable, and yet be as far from Christ as ever); but to mortify the whole body of sin; to crucify the old man with the affections and lusts; to be altogether dead to the world, and alive unto God; and to have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus, viewing every thing as he viewed it, regarding every thing as he regarded it, and doing every thing as he did it. This is a work not to be undertaken lightly, or to be executed easily. There are also innumerable *difficulties* to be encountered. Whatever a man may think about *worldly* ease, or interest, or honour, he will find that he must sacrifice all these, and be, like his Master, “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” He that will follow Christ acceptably, must “follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” He must engage in a warfare, and maintain it manfully, against all his spiritual enemies. He must endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and if his own life stand in competition with his duty to God, he must sacrifice it cheerfully, accounting death in his cause the greatest honour.

Now these things, I say, should be well considered, and maturely weighed. We should consider *whether Christ be worthy of all this labour and sorrow; whether heaven will be a sufficient recompence for it; and whether God has given us a heart to choose him thus for our portion and eternal great reward?* In this manner we should “count the cost;” and then, from a conviction that the pearl of great price is indeed worth all that we possess, we should “sell all, and buy it.”]

But there is another error, against which we need equally to be guarded; namely,

II. Procrastination—

This indeed is even more common than the former—

[The person whom our Lord enjoined to follow him, was already “a disciple:” but it was our Lord’s will that he should become a more stated attendant on him, and a preacher of his Gospel. But, though this man did not intend to shrink from the duty imposed on him, he thought he had a more imperious duty at the present, and that his obedience to the Saviour’s call should be postponed to that. But our Lord would admit of no delay: he intimated to the man, that, however commendable it was to shew a filial respect to his deceased parent, and however short the time might be that he would be detained by it,

his

his call to follow him was clear, and of paramount obligation. He intimated further, that the business which he had desired to engage in might just as well be performed by others, who, being destitute of spiritual life, were unfit for the higher office to which he was called: "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou, and preach the kingdom of God^a."

Now, though we may suppose that there was something peculiar in this, and therefore not applicable to ourselves in its full extent, it is evident that our Lord intended to impress on the minds of all this solemn truth, that nothing could justify a disobedience to his commands, or a delay in dedicating ourselves to his service.

But the fact is, that almost every one imagines he has some present engagement of more importance; and, when called to follow Christ, replies, "Let me first go, and do this or that: let me finish my present business; let me get out of my present situation; let me attain such an object." They will not say, "I will never follow Christ;" but they plead some excuse for not following him at present. Alas! how many thousands perish through this delusion! They think "the fit time is not yet come;" they promise themselves "a more convenient season;" and thus they delay, till death cuts short their purposes, and puts an end to their existence.]

But this evil, like the former, must be banished from us—

[If so specious a plea was not admitted by our Lord, what other can be? We must not understand our Lord as pouring contempt on filial duty; for he requires all to "shew piety at home, and to requite their parents" to the utmost of their power: but he would have us to know that the duty of devoting ourselves to him is superior to every other, and that "the kingdom of God and his righteousness must be sought by us *in the first place*." If any attention to worldly duties be pleaded for the neglect of our souls, he would remind us that the plea will not be admitted in the day of judgment. On some *particular occasions*, indeed, "he will have mercy and not sacrifice:" but, *in the great work of salvation*, our duty to God must supersede every other. The care of our soul is *the one thing needful*; and *that* must be attended to, whatever else may be neglected. *That* admits of no delay. This is the only moment that we can call our own: and he who postpones the concerns of his soul till the morrow, has reason to fear that God will

^a Compare Luke ix. 60.

will say to him, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." "*This* should be regarded as the only accepted time, the only day of our salvation."

From hence then we may further LEARN,

1. How to estimate the things of time—

[Our blessed Lord has taught us this effectually by his example. Though he was the Maker and Proprietor of all things, he chose to dwell in a more destitute condition than even the beasts of the field or the fowls of the air, even without any stated place where to repose his head. By this he has shewn what an empty, worthless portion riches are; and how contented the poor should be with their humble lot. He has shewn, that to serve, and honour, and enjoy God is the most desirable state on earth; and that whether we have a larger or smaller portion in our way to heaven, is scarcely worth a thought. To follow him is our one duty, and should be our one concern. If we have much of this world, we should serve him with it; and if but little, we should live, like the birds of the air, in a cheerful dependence on his good providence^b; contented equally "to abound, or to suffer need;" and feeling that when we "have nothing, we are really possessing all things."]

2. How to act in reference to eternity—

[The thought of eternity must, so to speak, swallow up every other. We must make no account of any thing that is to be sacrificed, or any thing that is to be endured, in the service of our God; but must devote ourselves to him without hesitation and without reserve. If, like the Disciple in the text, we are called to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, we should shew what exalted thoughts we have of the Ministerial office, by our self-denying diligence in the discharge of it. We should "not seek great things for ourselves," or "entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life," but be contented with less of this world's goods, that we may be more at liberty to advance the interests of our Redeemer and the welfare of his Church and people. But, whatever be our station in the world, we are equally called to "follow Christ;" and on our obedience to that call our eternal happiness depends. I say not, that we should neglect our civil or social duties; for God commands us to perform them with all diligence: but I do say, that where the concerns of time and eternity interfere with each other, we must labour, "not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give unto us."]

^b Matt. vi. 25, 26.

DCCIII.

WISDOM AND INNOCENCE TO BE UNITED.

Matt. x. 16. *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

IT is a favourite idea with many, that a great part of the Scriptures was written for those only of the Apostolic age; and that it is improper for us to apply to ourselves what was delivered to them. Now we readily grant that some things had a peculiar and primary reference to the Apostles, and to others of that day; and that, *as far as any thing was peculiar to them*, it would be wrong for us to take it to ourselves: but we must assert, on the other hand, that *as far as we are in the same circumstances with them*, what was spoken to them is strictly and properly applicable to us. What was delivered to the Apostles themselves in this address of our Lord, was only partially applicable to them at the time it was spoken. The foregoing part of the chapter was suited to them in their first mission through the land; but what is contained in our text and to the end of the chapter was comparatively inapplicable to them till after the day of Pentecost: yet, *as far as circumstances required it*, they were to regard it from the first moment that it was spoken to them. Thus then it is with us: every word of God, to whomsoever delivered, is to be considered as intended for us, in proportion as our situations accord with theirs to whom it was delivered. Accordingly we do not hesitate to take to ourselves the direction in our text: nor is it to Ministers only that we would apply it, but to Christians in general, whose situation in the world so far accords with that of the Apostles, that they universally need the same warning to be given them, and the same path of duty to be pointed out.

We

We shall proceed to notice then,

I. The situation of Christians in the world—

It may seem harsh to represent them as “sheep in the midst of wolves:” and we will grant that the general establishment of Christianity, and the laws enacted for the support of it, afford a protection to us which the first Christians did not enjoy; but the enmity of the human heart against God is the same as ever; and the light of Divine truth is as offensive to the carnal eye as ever; and the hostility which exists against true Christians at this day, is the same as existed in the heart of Cain, and of all ungodly men in every age; it is the same in its nature, and, when unrestrained by law, is the same also in its degree; it only differs in the particular acts by which it is evinced. The distinction of wolves and sheep still exists, though the power of the wolves is restrained: but what St. Paul says in reference to Ishmael is still as true as ever, “*As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*”

In confirmation of this, we appeal to the manner in which the godly are universally treated:—

1. An universal prejudice exists against them—

[Names of reproach are given them now, as much as in any age of the world. These names vary from time to time; but they are constantly understood to designate persons that are weak and contemptible; and men universally affix a stigma to the character that is branded with them. Let any person, however respectable in himself, and however excellent in his deportment, be spoken of as a Methodist, (or any other name of like import,) and every one will conceive him to be either a weak enthusiast or a designing hypocrite: every thing that can be spoken to his disadvantage will be boldly asserted, eagerly listened to, and readily believed; nor will one single person in ever so large a company be found bold enough to vindicate his injured character. If a fault can be found in him, it will be magnified beyond all bounds: what he has done once or twice in his life, will be represented as his daily practice; and the faults of one will be imputed to the whole

whole body: nor can a wolf more delight in the blood of a lamb, than these do in tearing to pieces the characters of the Lord's people. We appeal to all, Whether this be not true? and whether there be not still as much reason as ever to say, "We know concerning this sect, that it is every where spoken against?"]

2. Their very character exposes them to injuries—

[It is well known to be an established principle with them, to suffer patiently, and not to avenge themselves; insomuch, that if a person professing godliness should indulge an angry and vindictive spirit, he would be universally considered as having no pretensions to real piety. Hence every one is bold enough to insult or injure them: a man that would not dare to shew the smallest disrespect to a worldly character, will take liberties with them, and calumniate them without fear. As the defenceless condition of the sheep invites the wolf, whose ferocity would be curbed in the presence of a lion, so a cowardly principle operates on the world, and instigates them to attack those from whom they expect no vindictive retaliation.]

3. They are considered as the legitimate prey of all who choose to oppress them—

[It is well said by the prophet, "He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey." Let any other respectable person be calumniated, and he will find some one to espouse his cause; but, as we before observed, the religious man has no advocate; every one has a right to say of him whatever he pleases. Let any other order of men be loaded with opprobrium, and multitudes will start up in their defence: yea, even a word that can bear an interpretation unfavourable to them, will be construed into a libel: but ten thousand words, the most harsh, the most cruel, and the most unjust, may be spoken against religious people; the whole order of them may be condemned as fools and hypocrites, and no one will feel himself offended, nor will any one complain of the uncharitableness of such censures. Whence then is this? Is it not, that these people are generally understood to be excluded in a measure from the common rights of men; and that every one has a right to attack them as he will? Let a disorderly man interrupt a public or private concert, and an universal indignation will be excited against him: but let him disturb a religious assembly in their public or social ordinances, and the world will be far more ready to vindicate than
condemn

condemn him; or, at most, will only smile, as though he had committed but a slight and venial offence.

Do not these things shew, that religious people are not on a footing of equality with others; and that, in respect to such treatment, they are as sheep in the midst of wolves? Yes, verily, it both is so, and must be so: "The servant cannot be above his lord; and, if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, they will also those of his household."]

Let us now then consider,

II. The conduct which that situation calls for—

The serpent is said to be "more subtle than all the beasts of the field:" and the dove is proverbially kind and innocent. Now the wisdom of the one and the harmlessness of the other are very desirable to be combined in the Christian character; because it is by such an union only that the Christian will be enabled to cope successfully with his more powerful enemies.

He should unite these graces,

1. In the avoiding of evil—

[It is lawful and proper to avoid persecution, when we can do it without violating the laws of truth. The Apostles, "when persecuted in one city, were directed to flee to another:" and that great champion of Christianity, St. Paul, when the Jews laid wait for him at the gates of Damascus, was "let down by the wall in a basket," that he might escape their fury. Our Lord himself too, when ensnaring questions were put to him, so that his answer, whatever it might be, would be made an occasion of accusation against him, repeatedly avoided the snare, sometimes by not answering at all, sometimes by a significant action, sometimes by asking a question in return: thus baffling the designs of his blood-thirsty enemies, and constraining them to say, "Never man spake like this man." In this way we may act also. We must not dissemble, like Peter, to please or satisfy any set of men whatever; but we may take advantage of the peculiar views and prejudices of our enemies, to divide their counsels, and avert from ourselves their combined malignity. Thus did St. Paul, when the Pharisees and Sadducees were persecuting him with united fury: by professing himself a Pharisee, he engaged one half of his enemies on his side, and disconcerted the measures which would otherwise have been executed

703.] WISDOM AND INNOCENCE TO BE UNITED. 267

executed against him. There is danger, however, when on such ground as this, of violating Christian simplicity: it is safer far to take for our model the condescending kindness of the Apostle, in "becoming all things to all men," and in conforming ourselves to their habits and sentiments, wherever we can do it without violating the essential principles of the Gospel. In this way we shall truly comply with the direction in our text, and make the enmity of others against Christianity an occasion of displaying its unrivalled excellence.]

2. In the doing of good—

[It is lamentable to see how often well-meaning Christians defeat their own purposes by their want of judgment. They will reprove sin; but they will reprove it with so much harshness, or in so public a manner, as to irritate only, and not to reclaim, the offender. In conveying instruction also, they overlook all the circumstances of time and place, as well as the state of those they address. They forget that there is much wisdom required "to win souls;" that they should "choose out acceptable words," which shall "distil as the dew," and insinuate themselves gently into the minds of the hearers: they will speak the truth freely at all times, without considering whether they be not "casting their pearls before swine, who will only turn again and rend them." Some, as soon as they have attained a little knowledge themselves, will set themselves up for public teachers, and take upon themselves the office of the Ministry without any call, either from God or man; little thinking what a stumbling-block they cast before many, whom they harden in their prejudices against the Gospel of Christ. In a word, they think that zeal is every thing; and that, if only they endeavour to do good, they need not be much concerned in what way they do it. But they need to be told, that Paul himself, even when going to meet the whole college of Apostles, took the precaution of communicating privately with the chief among them first, lest by an abrupt disclosure of all his history at once he should excite their prejudices, and occasion disorder in the Church^a: and it will be well for them to treasure up in their minds that observation of Solomon, "I wisdom dwell with prudence^b."]

3. In the whole of their deportment—

[Christians should be "a wise and understanding people," and should have their whole conduct regulated by "sound wisdom and discretion." They should be careful

^a Gal. ii. 2.

^b Prov. viii. 12.

ful “not to give occasion to their enemies to speak reproachfully.” They should rather be studious to “cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against them,” and to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing.” This is strongly inculcated in those words of the Apostle, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without:” and it was admirably illustrated in the conduct of Daniel, which constrained his bitterest enemies to say, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it concerning the law of his God.” With this view, therefore, we should avoid all needless singularities; we should cultivate a meek and courteous spirit; we should be especially attentive to all the duties of our calling, and should labour to “please all men for their good, to edification.” In short, our determination through grace should be like that of the Psalmist, “I will walk wisely before thee in a perfect way.”

We must however avoid every thing that savours of artifice and contrivance. There is an immense difference between carnal wisdom and that which is truly spiritual: there is a frankness and godly sincerity in the Christian’s character which abhors all deceit and cunning. St. Paul distinguishes them in that advice of his, “I would have you wise unto that which is good, but *simple* concerning evil:” and in his own example he observed that distinction with undeviating, unremitting care^d.]

To assist you in the execution of these arduous duties, we subjoin a few DIRECTIONS:

1. Do not expect too much from man—

[You have been enabled perhaps to be “blameless and harmless, as sons of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation:” but do not therefore expect that the world will become your friends: if they “are at peace with you,” it is as much as the Scripture authorizes you to hope for under the most favourable circumstances: the wolf must change its nature, before it can perfectly accord with the sheep. If wisdom and piety could have disarmed the world, Christ had never suffered. “To do well and to suffer for it,” is all that you are to expect from man.]

2. Do not be grieved at the evil treatment that you meet with—

[If you suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are rather to rejoice: it is a great honour conferred upon you, a testimony

^c Rom. xvi. 19. ἀνεπαίς, the same word as in the text.

^d 2 Cor. i. 12. “Not with fleshly wisdom.”

testimony from God in your favour, a means of glorifying him before men, and of augmenting your own glory in a future world. Be not then cast down by your afflictions, but rather glorify God on this behalf.]

3. Guard against the risings of your own spirit—

[If others are wolves, you are still to be as sheep, meek and patient, even like Him who was “led as a sheep to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth.” “In your patience then possess ye your souls;” and “let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.”]

4. Look up to God for daily supplies of wisdom and grace—

[It is by the grace of God alone that we can do any good thing. If we attempt any thing in our own strength, we shall fail. But God has promised, “if any man lack wisdom or grace, and ask it of him, he will give him liberally and without upbraiding.” Beg of him, therefore, to give you such continued and abundant grace, that you may be enabled to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”]

° See Jam. i. 5. & Isai. xli. 10.

DCCIV.

CHRIST'S ANSWER TO JOHN'S DISCIPLES.

Matt. xi. 4—6. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them; and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

IT has pleased God in every age so to deal with his most favoured servants as to shew, that though he had raised them up and qualified them for his service, he was not dependent on them, nor needed their labours for the support of his interests in the world. He has permitted many to languish on a bed of sickness, or to be immured in a prison, or to be cut off by an untimely death, when they might have been actively engaged in promoting his

his glory: and this circumstance has sometimes filled the weak and inexperienced with surprise. But it becomes all to submit with meekness even to his darkest dispensations, assured that, though clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne. We are persuaded that this was the frame of the Baptist's mind when shut up in prison, and apparently neglected by his Lord and Master. Some indeed imagine, that John was himself beginning to doubt whether Jesus were the Christ: but when we consider the miraculous attestations of it which he had received from heaven, and the many testimonies which he himself had borne to Christ, and the evidence which Christ daily gave of his Messiahship, and that there was no other person at that time existing as a rival of Christ, we cannot admit the idea that John's faith was at all shaken. But his disciples hearing of the wonderful miracles which Christ wrought, yet thinking that, if he were the Messiah, he would have shewn more regard for John, and used his almighty power to liberate him from prison, were much in doubt, and were therefore referred by their master to Jesus himself, in order to get all the satisfaction which they desired. To Jesus they came, and inquired whether *he* were the true Messiah or not: and our Lord, not choosing to let their faith rest on a mere verbal testimony from himself, gave them the fullest evidence of their senses, and cautioned them against yielding to the force of prejudice, or rejecting him on account of any circumstances which they could not altogether account for. His answer to them will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The grounds we have for faith in Christ—

There were two things to which our Lord appealed in proof of his divine Mission:

1. The miracles he wrought—

[These

704.] CHRIST'S ANSWER TO JOHN'S DISCIPLES. 271

[These were great and stupendous, wrought on the occasion, publicly, in the sight of these messengers; and they were of such a nature as did not admit of any confederacy or collusion—— Nothing but a Divine power could have effected such things; and consequently they were unexceptionable testimonies from God himself that he was the true Messiah.

With the disciples of John these miracles must have had peculiar weight; for John, whom they regarded as their master, had wrought no miracle^a; whereas the miracles which they had just seen were precisely such as the Messiah was to perform: and the very same Prophet who had spoken most plainly of John's office, as the forerunner of the Messiah, had specified these very works, as distinctive of the Messiah himself^b.

These works are still a standing proof that Christ was the promised Messiah: and the spiritual effects which are still wrought by his word, and which precisely correspond with those miracles, are yet further evidences of the same truth: for wherever the true Gospel is preached, there "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up" to a new and heavenly life.]

2. The preaching of the Gospel to the poor—

[The philosophers of old addressed themselves only to the great and learned, whilst they wholly overlooked the lower classes of society; and even the Prophets were sent principally to the kings and nobles of Israel: but our Lord addressed himself chiefly to the poor: he sought to benefit the meanest and the vilest of mankind. This of itself was a strong presumptive proof that he was the Messiah, because an impostor would rather have sought to gain over to his interests the great and powerful. But it was foretold that the Messiah should have peculiar respect to the poor in his ministrations^c, and that this regard for them should eminently distinguish his kingdom upon earth^d.

This evidence also still exists, not merely as an historical fact, but as a matter of daily experience and observation: for it is universally true, wherever the Gospel is preached, that the poor are the people to whom the word is sent, and

^a John x. 41.

^b Isai. xxxv. 4—6.

^c Compare Isai. lxi. 1. with Luke iv. 18. What is called "the meek" in the one place, is called "the poor" in the other.

^d Ps. lxxii. 2, 4, 12, 13.

and that they chiefly, though not exclusively, are benefited by it^c.]

But faith in Christ, notwithstanding these grounds, is not easy to be exercised; as will appear by considering,

II. The difficulties it has to surmount—

Our Lord himself intimates, as indeed the Prophets had before declared^f, that he was likely to prove a stumbling-block to many: and it must be confessed that there were many things in him which were calculated to offend a carnal mind.

1. The meanness of his appearance—

[His birth and education as a carpenter, his abject condition, (without even a place where to lay his head,) the poverty of his attendants, together with the contempt poured upon him by all ranks and orders of men, were circumstances which must have been an occasion of stumbling to any one, but especially to those who had been taught to expect only a temporal king, and a triumphant Messiah. Let us only put ourselves in their place, and conceive of a poor carpenter, surrounded by a few illiterate fishermen, and professing himself to be the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world; what should we think of such pretensions? Whatever miracles he wrought, we should be very slow of heart to believe in him, and very backward to become his acknowledged followers. Something of the same difficulty still exists; and it operates with great force upon the world at large. The followers of Jesus are still “a poor and afflicted people,” despised and hated for his name’s sake: and it is no easy matter to think that *they* are right, in opposition to the great and learned who reject him: we cannot endure to be told, that “what God has hid from the wise and prudent, he has revealed unto babes:” we are ready to reply, like those of old, “Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But for this people, who knoweth not the law, they are cursed;” they are misguided, ignorant enthusiasts, wholly undeserving of any notice or regard.]

2. The mysteriousness of his doctrines—

[Poor and despised as he was, he professed to be in heaven whilst he was yet on earth; yea, to be one with the

^c 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

^f Isai. viii. 14, 15.

the Father, and to know and do all that the Father himself either knew or did. He declared that he would give his life a ransom for the souls of men; that all must "eat his body and drink his blood," if they would be partakers of his salvation; and that as soon as ever they should eat his flesh and drink his blood, they should dwell in him, and he in them, and he would give them eternal life and raise them up to the enjoyment of it at the last day.

Now these were "hard sayings," which they were not able to hear. And are they not hard sayings still? When we speak of a life of faith on the Son of God, of maintaining the most intimate fellowship with him, and receiving out of his fulness a constant supply of all spiritual blessings, are not these things deemed enthusiastic and absurd? Wherever these truths are insisted on with becoming energy, does not a considerable degree of reproach attach both to those who preach; and those who receive them? Yes; notwithstanding we profess ourselves followers of Christ, "the preaching of the cross is yet foolishness to us," till God himself has humbled us in the dust, and subdued our spirits to the obedience of faith.]

3. The self-denying nature of his precepts—

[The very first condition imposed on his disciples was, to "deny themselves, and take up their cross daily, and follow him." He shewed them by his own example what a superiority to every thing in this world he required, and told them plainly that they must be no more of the world than he was: and finally, he warned them, that he would acknowledge none as his disciples, unless they were truly willing, at any time and in any manner, to lay down their lives for him. How offensive these declarations and injunctions were to the carnal hearts of his hearers, we may judge by the conduct of the rich youth, who, though convinced in his judgment that Jesus was the Christ, could not prevail upon himself to follow him, but abandoned all his hope in Christ, rather than make the sacrifice that was demanded of him.

And what is it that at this day forms the principal ground of offence against the Gospel? It is the purity of its precepts. If only we would leave men at liberty to indulge their corrupt desires, and to retain their earthly and sensual dispositions, we might set forth the mysteries of the Gospel as strongly as we pleased: but, if we require from our hearers the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and a conformity to his heavenly example, we put a stumbling-block before them, which they fall over to their eternal ruin: they can-

not, they will not endure to hear of such requisitions; and on account of their aversion to such restraints they reject the Gospel altogether.]

But that faith which is the gift of God will triumph over all: hence,

III. The commendation given it, when duly exercised—

To have the mind brought to a cordial acquiescence in all that is spoken of the Lord Jesus, is indeed a great victory; and blessed is that man who has attained it: for that acquiescence clearly shews,

1. That he is taught of God—

[It is impossible for the human mind, blended as it is by innumerable lusts and prejudices, to see the truth and excellence of the Gospel, unless it have been first enlightened by the Holy Spirit; “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” When Peter confessed his Master to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” our Lord told him, that “flesh and blood had not taught him this, but that his heavenly Father had revealed it to him;” on which account he pronounced him truly blessed: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona,” &c.: and at another time he pronounced all his disciples blessed on a similar account: “Blessed are your eyes, for ye see; and your ears, for ye hear.”]

2. That he is brought into the path of life—

[The man who exercises true and saving faith, must have “passed from death unto life;” for our Lord himself says, “This is life eternal, to know thee, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” The change that has taken place in him is not in his understanding only, but his heart: he must have become a new creature: the same Divine operation that wrought faith in his heart, must have produced every other grace, according to the measure in which the gift of faith has been bestowed upon him. Having “received Christ Jesus the Lord, he has the privilege of being a Child of God.” And is not *he* blessed? What man on earth has so much reason to rejoice as *he*? When some were ready to magnify the blessedness of our Lord’s mother on account of her having borne and nourished such a son,
our

our Lord rectified their mistake, and taught them to consider every true Believer as *more blessed* on account of his *spiritual* relation to him, than she was on account of her relation *according to the flesh*; "yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it."]

3. That all the glory of heaven is his—

[Being born of God, he is born "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him; and he shall be kept by the power of God, through faith," unto the everlasting possession of it. "The Lord will not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people." Say then, is not *he* blessed that has such a Father, such a Friend, such a Protector, and such a portion? Truly he is blessed: and the Lord himself will ere long pronounce him so: "Come, thou blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who openly stumble at Christ—

[You think that because many learned persons deny the divinity of his person, and the expiatory power of his death, your rejection of him is excusable. But no such excuse was ever admitted for his enemies of old; nor will it ever be admitted for you. It was foretold that he should be "a rock of offence; and that *many* would stumble at him and fall:" but it was declared by our Lord himself, that "all who should fall on that stone, should be broken in pieces; and that on whomsoever it should fall, it would grind him to powder." Beware then how you justify your infidelity, or attempt to extenuate its guilt; for the unalterable determination of God is, that "he who believeth not, shall not see life, but that the wrath of God shall abide upon him."]

2. Those who profess indeed to receive him, but are inwardly offended at him—

[It is to no purpose to receive his word in theory, whilst we practically deny its influence on our hearts. He himself says, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Do not judge yourselves, therefore, by your professions, but by the manner in which you live upon him, and serve him. Whilst there is any one saying of his that appears hard to you, or any one commandment that is grievous, or any other attainment that is not ardently desired by you, your heart is not right with God; and
Christ,

Christ, in that particular, is an offence unto you. O “judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord.”]

3. Those to whom Christ is altogether precious—

[To those who truly believe, he is precious: his person, his office, his character, his word, his dispensations, all are precious; yea, “he is altogether lovely.” And what shall I say unto you? What more suitable, than the angel’s address to Mary? “Blessed are ye among men; ye are highly favoured of the Lord.” You have within yourselves the evidence that Christ is “he that was to come;” and you have no occasion, or disposition, to “look for any other.” If ye are “poor,” adore his name that “his Gospel has been preached to you,” and that you have not heard it in vain. Adore your heavenly Father too, who hath “chosen the poor of this world, to be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom.” If, on the other hand, ye be among the rich, you have, if possible, still greater reason to adore the riches of his grace, for distinguishing you thus from the great mass of those who reject him, and for bringing you into his kingdom, notwithstanding all the difficulties which your wealth has interposed to obstruct your entrance. Labour then, with your more numerous talents, to bring more honour to him, and to evince to all around you, that his grace is still as efficacious to heal the diseases of the soul, as ever his word was to heal the diseases of the body. The various persons whom he healed or raised from the dead were witnesses for him in every place: be ye the same; and let the whole of your spirit and conduct approve itself to the world as his workmanship: so shall ye be truly blessed both in time and in eternity.]

DCCV.

CHRIST’S COMMENDATION OF JOHN.

Matt. xi. 11, 12. *Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

OUR blessed Lord lost no opportunity of encouraging persons to believe on him. He had forborne to applaud the character of John whilst
John

John was bearing testimony to him, lest it should be thought that there was a concerted plan between them to exalt each other: but, when John was now shut up in prison, and come near to the close of his ministry, our Lord bore testimony to him in the most exalted terms. The people had flocked from every quarter to hear John: and our Lord asked them, what sort of a person they had expected to hear and see: they had not travelled so far to see a fickle man, like a reed shaken with the wind, or a soft effeminate man, like those often bred in courts; but a prophet, who, with self-denying labour and unshaken steadfastness, was instructing and reforming the land: and such indeed he was, even like Elijah of old, whose spirit and character he bore, agreeably to the prophetic representation that had been given of him four hundred years before. Yet eminent as John was, even greater than any prophet that had ever lived, our Lord told his hearers, that the least of his true disciples was really greater than the Baptist himself.

Many interpret this as referring only to those who should preach his Gospel; but though it is true that the Apostles were superior to John in their office, and should far exceed him in the success of their labours, we see no reason for limiting to *them* what was spoken to *the whole multitude*: we are persuaded, on the contrary, that this information was intended for the encouragement of *all*, and as an incentive to them to follow him, with the same avidity and zeal as they had manifested in following John.

Considering the passage thus as referring to all true Christians, we shall take occasion from it to point out,

I. Their pre-eminent advantages—

John was greater than all that had ever been born of woman, not in sanctity (for Daniel, and perhaps several others, were not a whit inferior to

to him in this respect,) but in office; being the forerunner of the Messiah, who did not merely speak of him at a distance, but pointed him out as present; and declared him to be that very "Lamb of God that should take away the sins of the world." But the least in the Messiah's kingdom, which was just then founded upon earth, are greater than he, inasmuch as they have,

1. A fuller discovery of Christ's character—

[John himself, and indeed the Apostles too, till after the resurrection, had very imperfect views of Christ: they saw not, or saw but very faintly, the dignity of his person, the necessity of his death, the certainty of his resurrection, or the nature of his kingdom: but the most ignorant of Christ's disciples have a comparatively clear, enlarged, and certain knowledge of him: they know what God has revealed concerning his *person*, as Emmanuel, God with us; his *work*, as fulfilling and satisfying the law for us; and his *offices*, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church and people—— In this they are as superior to John, as John was to the least enlightened of all the antient prophets.]

2. A richer experience of his love—

[They can tell, not merely what he *is to do*, but what he *has done*: yea, they can say, "He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*." They have felt *the virtue of his blood* in purging their consciences from guilt, and *the efficacy of his grace* in subduing their most inveterate corruptions. They know what it is to receive out of his fulness the blessings which they need, and to maintain sweet fellowship with him from day to day. They have within themselves the evidence that he is a living, a gracious, and an almighty Saviour, who fulfils to them all his promises, guides them by his Spirit, upholds them by his arm, sanctifies them by his grace, comforts them with his presence, and renders them meet for the enjoyment of his heavenly kingdom—— In this their superiority to the Baptist is as the meridian sun to the early dawn.]

The ministry of John was as remarkable as his endowments. As he had clearer views than all who preceded him, so was the success of his labours incomparably greater: for almost the whole of Judea, and even of the people beyond Jordan, came

came and were baptized of him^a. Even those who were the most remote from the kingdom of heaven, according to human apprehensions, were the foremost to seek admission into it, and to take it, as it were, from those, who, from their education and professions; seemed most likely to become the subjects of it^b. In this conduct of theirs we may see a lively image of the followers of Christ, and may read,

II. Their universal character—

Whilst they approve themselves the Lord's people by their views of his salvation, they manifest in relation to it,

1. A fixed purpose—

[They regard the care of the soul as the one thing needful: other things may be good and useful; but this is necessary: it cannot be dispensed with for a single day; nor will any thing be tolerated that would interfere with it. Allurements or menaces are alike disregarded by them: no menace is terrible to them in comparison of God's displeasure; no pleasure is desirable in comparison of his favour. Hence, if tempted, they reply, What shall it profit me to gain the whole world and lose my own soul? And, if threatened, they answer, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." In a word, they readily part with all to obtain the pearl of great price; and having "bought the truth," nothing under heaven can induce them to sell it. As in a race the persons contending for the prize may easily be distinguished from the spectators by the earnestness with which they pursue their object, so may these be known amidst a supine and thoughtless generation: they are lights shining in the midst of a dark, benighted world.]

2. A persevering endeavour—

[Having put their hand to the plough, they will not look back again. They know that they must "endure unto the end, if ever they would be saved;" and they wait upon God in prayer, and beg him to perfect that which concerneth them. They now desire, not merely to be saved from death and hell, but to have Christ dwelling and reigning
in

^a Matt. iii. 5, 6. Luke xvi. 16.

^b This is the sense in which many understand the latter verse of our text. Compare Luke vii. 28—30. Matt. xxi. 31, 32.

in them: nor will they ever be satisfied till "every thought of their hearts is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Hence their diligence in reading the word, and in every ordinance of religion, whether public or private. They find enemies both without and within: but they will not yield to discouragement. They know that their Redeemer is mighty, and able to save them to the uttermost; and therefore they go forth in his strength, and, though defeated, rally; though wounded, fight; though faint, pursue: and never put off their armour till they are made more than conquerors.]

ADDRESS,

1. The ignorant Christian—

[Wherein are you superior to John and all the Prophets? Truly you are less than Heathens, because of your neglect of your superior advantages—— Remember that God will "take vengeance on them that know him not, and that obey not his Gospel."]

2. The formal Christian—

[You value yourselves on your moderation: and, if there be a person striving to take the kingdom by violence, you discourage him. You approve of violence in every thing else; and disapprove of it where alone it should be used—— Did you never hear that "many *seek* to enter into heaven, but fail," because they do not *strive*? Beware lest that be your unhappy case.]

3. The fainting Christian—

[Be not weary in well doing. You have many difficulties, it is true; but you have omnipotence on your side: and "if God be for you, who can be against you?" The temptations you have, may seem peculiar to you; but they are only "such as are common to man:" and God engages that you shall have "none without a way to escape" from it, or strength to withstand it. "Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of his might."]

But beware of sloth: *that* will soon enervate the soul, and paralyse every effort in the way to heaven. The promises of God and the assistances of his Spirit do not supersede your own exertions: it is true at this day, as much as in the days of Christ, that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent must take it by force."]

DCCVI.

THE NECESSITY OF A DECIDED ADHERENCE TO
CHRIST.

Matt. xii. 30. *He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.*

TO inculcate a devotedness of heart to God, and to insist upon it as indispensably necessary to salvation, is generally deemed harsh and uncharitable: and certainly, if it were not required in Scripture, we should be exceedingly blameworthy in so alarming and terrifying the minds of men: but we must speak what God has spoken, and deliver faithfully what he has commissioned us to declare. To what purpose would it be for us to deceive our fellow-creatures? We might speak of candour, and prophesy smooth things, and lull men asleep in sin; but we could not invalidate the word of God, or reverse the sentence that he shall utter: the declaration of our Lord would still condemn both our hearers and ourselves: "If we are not with him, we must be against him," and he will account us his enemies in the last day.

In considering this declaration, it will be proper,
I. To explain it—

Taken by itself, it has no material difficulty in it—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is a Sovereign, who is at war with all the powers of darkness: and we, as his subjects, are bound to fight his battles — — — Among the subjects of earthly monarchs no neutrality is admitted: if their kingdom be invaded, all must unite to repel the enemy: neutrality in such a case would be treason. Now, thus whosoever joins not himself to the standard of our Lord, to fight under his banners, and to oppose his enemies, is a traitor to his cause; "he is really against our Lord, if he be not for him." As a labourer who has neglected to gather up his corn, has in fact wasted and scattered the property of his employer, so he, whose duty it is to exert himself in gathering an harvest of souls for the
Lord

Lord Jesus, if he neglect his duty, is really the means of alienating them the more, and of driving them farther from him.]

But, when compared with a passage of an opposite aspect, a considerable difficulty arises from it—

[Our Lord on another occasion used an expression apparently the very reverse of this: “He that is not against us, is on our part^a.” Now which of these assertions is true? for, *in words*, they plainly contradict each other: or, if both be true, how are we to reconcile them with each other? The true way to ascertain their meaning is, to consider the *occasions* on which they were spoken.

When our Lord uttered the words of our text, he had been arguing against those who imputed his miracles to a confederacy with Satan; and had shewn, that as the whole aim of his life was to destroy the influence of Satan over men, Satan would never have aided him in such a work; he would rather have withstood him to the utmost of his power: and consequently, the miracle which Jesus had wrought in expelling Satan from the demoniac, evinced his power over Satan, and his determination finally to bruise him under his people’s feet. From hence our Lord took occasion to observe, that there must be the same determined hostility in his people against sin and Satan as he himself had evinced; and that, if any of them should make a truce with Satan even for an hour, they would instantly be considered as traitors to him, and be dealt with as his enemies.

But when our Lord spake the words recorded by St. Mark, he had been reproving his disciples for presuming to forbid a man to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, merely because he did not associate himself with *them*. “Forbid him not,” says our Lord: “he is not a partisan of yours, it is true: but he is advancing my interests, as well as you; only he is doing it in a somewhat different way. His performing of miracles in my name is a proof of his faith in me, and of his concern for my honour: and therefore, though he may not have so clear views as you, or walk exactly in the way that you would have him, yet he is to be acknowledged as a friend of mine: he does nothing against me; and therefore must be considered as on my side.”

Thus the two passages, though apparently opposite, involve no contradiction whatever: the one shews us how
to

^a Mark ix. 40.

to act towards the avowed enemies of Christ; the other, how to act towards his less conspicuous friends: the one forbids *neutrality*; the other, *bigotry*, or *party-spirit*.]

Viewing these words then as a declaration that neutrality cannot be endured amongst the followers of Christ, we proceed,

II. To confirm it—

There is a twofold warfare, which, as Christian soldiers, we are to maintain; and to each of them does the declaration in our text apply. We must be decided and constant in our opposition to,

1. The enemies of Christ *within* us—.

[Amongst these we must number all our corrupt affections and propensities, which tend to the subversion of Christ's authority within us. Not one of these is to be spared, though it should be dear as a right eye, or apparently necessary as a right hand. They are indeed exceedingly numerous, and have "strong holds" which are almost impregnable. They are also mustered and led on by a subtle adversary, "the prince of the power of the air, who worketh in all the children of disobedience." Still, however, we must not be discouraged, but must go forth against them, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." We have armour, if I may so say, forged for us in heaven, and fitted to every part that is vulnerable, except the back, which we are on no account to turn to our enemy. Clothed in this, we need not be afraid: with the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith, we shall in due time be "more than conquerors." But we must never make a truce, or even parley with any of our enemies. "The filthiness both of the flesh and of the Spirit" must be opposed without ceasing, and without reserve. Every evil temper, every sensual inclination, all sloth, impenitence, unbelief, or whatever it be that "wars against the soul," must be mortified and subdued; nor must we ever cease from our conflict till we have overcome, and are crowned with victory.

Now, if we be not thus resolute, we shall not only not advance the kingdom of God within us, but shall weaken and destroy it. The work of grace within us is not like that of a painter or a statuary, that may be left and resumed at pleasure; but like that of a ponderous stone rolled up
a steep

a steep ascent, which will return, as soon as the force that impelled it is withdrawn. Relapses into sin tend exceedingly to impair the gracious principle within us; they harden the heart, and sear the conscience, and "grieve the Holy Spirit of God;" and if not speedily repented of, set us further from God than we were before our minds were first awakened^b: so true is it, that, if we "cease to gather with Christ, we scatter abroad."]

2. The enemies of Christ *around* us—

[The whole world is, as it were, risen up in arms against our Lord and Saviour; all of them saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Against them, therefore, we are to take part with our blessed Lord. We must protest against their maxims, their principles, and their conduct. We are "not to be of the world, even as Christ was not of the world." Instead of attempting to hold communion with them, which is impossible, we should "come out from among them, and be separate^c." The attempting to seek their friendship is an act of hostility against Christ himself^d. Let us not however mistake, as though religion required us to hate any of our fellow-creatures; we must *love their persons*, but *hate their ways*. This line of conduct is prescribed to all the followers of Christ: whilst they "glory in the cross of Christ," they must "by means of that cross be crucified unto the world, and the world be crucified unto them."

Now, if we draw back from this avowal of our sentiments and this decision in the cause of Christ, we rank ourselves immediately on the side of his enemies. "In forsaking his law, we praise the wicked," when rather, "by keeping his law we should contend with them^e." "We strengthen the hands of Christ's enemies," and in the most effectual manner promise them life, though every part of the Inspired Volume threatens them with death^f. Let us remember then that we must be faithful to our profession: we must shew "whose we are, and whom we serve:" we must "shine as lights in a dark world," and, "instead of being conformed to the world, we must, by being transformed through the renewing of our minds prove and exhibit to all around us what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God^g."]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. The proper objects of Christian zeal—

[There

^b 2 Pet. ii. 21.

^c 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

^d Jam. iv. 4.

^e Prov. xxviii. 4.

^f Ezek. xiii. 22.

^g Rom. xii. 2.

[There is a zeal that is good ; and there is. " a zeal that is not according to knowledge." Of the latter kind was that which the Apostles manifested when they forbade a man to cast out devils, merely because he did not follow with them. The work itself was good ; and its being done in the name of Jesus gave them reason to believe that he was a believer in Christ, though he did not unite himself to them. Should they not then rather have rejoiced in the good that was done, though it was not done precisely in the way which they would have preferred ? Alas ! the spirit which they indulged prevails in every age : men do not like to see the empire of Satan assailed, or the kingdom of Christ established, if it be not done by their own particular party, or by the means which they particularly prefer : and they would rather that the good were wholly left undone, than that persons, differing from each other in smaller matters, should unite together to effect it. All this is the effect of pride, and envy, and bigotry : and, whatever such persons may think, they will be reprov'd by Christ, even as the Apostles were. The proper object of our zeal is the advancement of Christ's kingdom upon earth, and in our own hearts in particular. To be zealously affected always in such a cause is a good thing : and I pray God that we may never relax our exertions in it to the latest hour of our lives.]

2. The necessity of abounding in it more and more—

[We have observed, that men cannot continue stationary in the Divine life : we must either advance or decline. Now it is not at our first conversion only that the words of our text are applicable to us, but at every period of our lives. The longer we have professed ourselves the Lord's servants, the more necessity there is for firmness and decision. To become lukewarm, is the worst of states,^a the most offensive to God, and the most injurious to ourselves^b. We have this only alternative, either to maintain a warfare against all the enemies of Christ, or to make Christ himself our enemy : and can any one doubt which he should prefer ? If we provoke *him* to anger, " will our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us ?" Let us then " fight a good fight, and quit ourselves like men : " then shall we " be approved of him who has chosen us to be soldiers," and reign with him in glory for evermore.]

^a Rev. iii. 17, 18.

DCCVII.

CHRIST'S REGARD TO HIS OBEDIENT FOLLOWERS.

Matt. xii. 46—50. *While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then said one unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.**

IT is not easy, engaged as we are in a variety of callings, to know at all times what is the duty of the present moment. Seasons may often occur when a tradesman may reasonably doubt whether he ought to be in his shop or in his closet: and it may sometimes be difficult to know exactly where to draw the line between the attentions due to earthly relatives and the higher duties of God's more immediate service. The example, however, which Christ has set us, may be of considerable use in regulating our conduct on such occasions. He was in a house teaching a great multitude of people who flocked around him: and his mother and his near kinsmen, apprehensive, perhaps, that he might provoke his enemies to destroy him, or that he would injure his own health by his incessant labours, endeavoured to get access to him, that they might persuade him to suspend his exertions. Not being able to get near him for the crowd, they called to him, and prevailed on the intermediate multitudes to inform him, that they

* Another on nearly the same words, (Mark iii. 31—35,) had some time before been written. The author, not adverting to that circumstance, composed this. On a comparison of the two, they are so exceedingly different, that, without altering a word in either, they are both presented to the public, in hope that they may be profitable, as illustrating different modes of treating the same text.

they stood without, greatly desirous to speak with him. On the message being delivered, our blessed Lord "looked round about on his surrounding audience," and, "stretching forth his hand" towards them, made use of the extraordinary language of our text:—in considering which, we shall shew,

I. In what light our Lord regarded his obedient followers—

We are sure, that, in asking, "Who is my mother or my brethren," he did not intend to act towards them with any disrespect: he only intended to declare the infinitely greater respect which he had for practical piety than for any other thing whatever; and to shew,

1. That his obedient followers were the exclusive objects of his regard—

[Doubtless, as a man, he felt the ties of consanguinity, and (most probably too) the partialities of friendship^a: but as the Mediator between God and man, who was appointed to judge the world, he considered nothing deserving his notice but a conformity to the will of God. A mere profession of his religion was so far from recommending any person to his favour, that it rendered him tenfold the more hateful in his eyes, if it were not accompanied with a suitable practice^b. He compares such a person to a man building his house upon the sand, which is sure to fall and overwhelm him in its ruins: and he assures us, that, in the last day, whatever zeal such an one may have shewn even in propagating the truth itself, he will utterly disown him as unworthy of the smallest regard^c. The person whom alone he will approve, is the conscientious and devoted servant of God, who does the will of God *cheerfully, constantly, and without reserve*. The obedience of a slave, were it ever so extensive, would be unacceptable to him, because it proceeds not from love. Nor, if we could conceive a person to obey from love, would his services be pleasing to God, if they were only occasional; because it would prove, that sin retained an allowed ascendancy over the soul. Nor, for the same reason, could the most uniform obedience be approved by him, if there were so much as

one

^a We suppose his peculiar love to John was of this kind.

^b Luke vi. 46.

^c Matt. vii. 21—27.

one single lust spared, or one single duty wilfully neglected. An eye, a hand, a foot, retained in opposition to the line of duty, would occasion the whole body to be cast into hell^d. But "*whosoever*" is truly upright in doing the will, the whole will, of God, "that person," whatever other recommendations he may want, shall certainly be an object of his peculiar regard: "Then are ye my disciples, if ye do whatsoever I command you."]

2. That there was no honour or happiness which he would not confer upon them—

[All are agreed, that, in a temporal view, the most honoured and blessed of all the human race was the Virgin Mary. Yet far more honoured, and more blessed, are all who cordially fulfil the will of God. This our Lord himself affirms^e: and, in the text, he seems almost to disclaim relationship to her, as it were, in comparison of those closer bonds which unite him to his obedient followers.

But it is not merely the names of brother, sister, mother, that we are to regard: we must consider what is implied in those terms; what ardent love to their persons; what constant attention to their wants; what a liberal supply of their necessities; what familiar intercourse with them at all seasons; what protection against dangers; and what glorious triumph he will give them over all their enemies. We must consider too, that when the relations that were formed by flesh and blood shall exist no longer, then shall these spiritual relations be still acknowledged, and all the blessings attached to them be continued through eternal ages.]

This being a matter not of speculation merely, but of great practical importance, let us consider,
II. The inferences to be deduced from it—

And here we cannot but observe, that if Christ so highly regards his obedient followers, then should we,

1. Honour them—

[The light of the godly has ever been so offensive to the lovers of darkness, that all possible methods have been used to veil its lustre, if not to extinguish it altogether. Who needs be told that there ever have been, and are at this day, terms of reproach, whereby to designate the obedient followers of Christ; and that they who are most active and diligent in his service usually bear the greatest share

^d Mark ix. 43—48.

^e Luke xi. 27, 28.

share of that reproach?—Even persons not wholly destitute of religious feeling, are yet often so awed by the fear of man, that they dare not own their respect for the godly, or even notice them as their acquaintance. They can hear the most eminent of God's servants calumniated, and never open their mouths in their defence; and they can even wish and long for their instructions, and not dare to put themselves in the way of receiving them. But what an horrible impiety is this; that the very thing which so endears them to Christ, should render them odious to us; or that we should be ashamed to call *them* friends whom "Christ is not ashamed to call his brethren!" Little do such contemners think *whom* they despise; or such timid Christians, of *whom* they are ashamed. Paul had no idea, that he was darting his shafts at Jesus, when he was persecuting, what he would call, some enthusiastic heretics: but Jesus said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" So it is now: they who receive his servants, receive him; and they who despise them, despise him. Beware then, lest ye provoke the Lord to be "ashamed of you in the presence of his Father and his holy angels." And as Paul said to Timothy, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner," so would I say to you, Be not ashamed of the Gospel, nor of any of those who obey it: but, as Christ honours his people, so do ye honour them, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. Be willing "to suffer affliction with them, and esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of the world."]

2. Seek to be of their number—

[Who would not wish that in the day of judgment Christ should say of him, That is my brother, my sister, my mother? What then must we do, in order to secure that blessing? Doubtless we must believe in Christ, and seek "to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, but his." But though it is by faith, and by faith only, that we are united to Christ, and made members of his family, yet must we be found doing the will of God, or else we can never be found in the number of his people. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly, in the world." Is it asked, What is the will of God? I answer briefly, first, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification^f;" and secondly, "Rejoice evermore,

^f 1 Thess. iv. 3.

evermore, pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks; for this also is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you^z." Here are two things, a *holy* and an *heavenly* life. All the lusts of the flesh must be mortified, all the evil tempers and dispositions subdued, and "the thoughts, as well as the actions, be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." This is a holy life. But besides that, you must be brought into a state of unfeigned, and, as it were, habitual delight in God, praying to him for all you want, praising him for all you enjoy, and glorying in him as your God and portion for evermore. This is an *heavenly* life. And by these two things you will discover your relation to Christ: the family likeness, if I may so speak, will be visible upon you. Let these things then be found upon you; for on them all your salvation depends. Your creed will signify nothing; your profession, nothing; your practice, nothing, without these: in his family "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ, that is, *the image of Christ upon your soul*, is all and in all^h."]

3. Choose them for your companions—

[Very few people have an idea how much of their present welfare and of their eternal prospects depends upon their associates and friends. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise," says Solomon; "but a companion of fools shall be destroyedⁱ." Again, "Make no friendship with an angry man, lest thou learn his ways^k." For the same reason I would say, associate not with a proud man, a worldly man, a covetous man, a lewd man: for it is certain that "evil communications will corrupt good manners." We almost unavoidably drink into the spirit of our companions: we adopt their sentiments; we conform to their practice; we become cast into their mould. Of what infinite importance then is it that we should associate with those whose sentiments and conduct accord with the mind of Christ! This was the conduct of the saints of old: David says, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee and that keep thy precepts^l." He calls them, "the excellent of the earth," and says, "that in them is all his delight^m." "He would not so much as know a wicked personⁿ." This is the conduct which becomes the friends and brethren of Christ:

ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 16—18. •

^h Col. iii. 11. Read the whole chapter without prejudice, and you will certainly find this to be the true sense of the passage.

^l Prov. xiii. 20.

^k Prov. xxii. 24, 25.

^l Ps. cxix. 63.

^m Ps. xvi. 3.

ⁿ Ps. ci. 4.

Christ: for "what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, or light with darkness, or Christ with Belial?" "Come out, therefore, from among the ungodly world, and be separate from them." "Christ was not of the world, neither must ye be:" for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God;" and, "if ye will be the friends of the world, you must to all eternity continue the enemies of God." If you would ever be acknowledged by Christ as his brethren, "be ye as he was, and let his people be your people," his friends your friends, his brethren your brethren.]

4. Do them all the good in your power—

[It is the duty of a Christian to lay out himself in acts of kindness towards all, in imitation of Him who "went about doing good," and of Him who "sendeth rain on the evil and on the good, on the just and on the unjust." But still there is a special obligation upon him to seek the welfare of the Lord's people: "Do good unto all men," says the Apostle, "but especially unto them that are of the household of faith." Let us suppose for one moment that amongst a multitude of persons in distress we spied the Virgin Mary herself; can we doubt whom we should select as the first object of our attention? Or is there one amongst us that would not gladly deny himself some little comforts to relieve her necessities? Should we not feel it our bounden duty to shew kindness to one who was so nearly related to the Lord Jesus Christ? Behold, then, this we may do at any time. He tells us where we may find his mother and his brethren. Is there a pious person languishing in this cottage or yonder workhouse? "*That same*" is his brother, or sister, or mother. In ministering to such, you do, in fact, minister to Christ himself; as he has said, "Whatsoever ye have done unto the least of *these my brethren*, ye have done it unto me." Search out then the pious few, wherever they may be found; and account it an honour to minister unto them. Are they hungry? feed them; are they naked? clothe them; are they sick or in prison? go and visit them. Are their troubles of a spiritual nature? "lift up the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; and say to them that are of a fearful heart, Fear not, behold, your God will come and save you." Sometimes perhaps your dearest friends may endeavour to damp your ardour in these holy exercises; but beware how you suffer yourselves to be diverted from such blessed employments.

° 2 Cor. vi. 14—17. P John xvii. 14, 16. 9 Jam, iv. 4.

1 Kin. xxii. 4. & 2 Kin. iii. 7.

employments. Doubtless there are other duties which demand a great portion of your attention: but whilst you are "diligent in business, be also fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."]

DCCVIII.

AGAINST FORMALITY AND INDIFFERENCE.

Matt. xvi. 6. *Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees.*

EVERY object around us is capable of affording us much important instruction. Our blessed Lord took occasion from all the common affairs of life, and all the things that presented themselves to his view, to lead his Disciples to the contemplation of heavenly things. It happened that his Disciples had neglected to take with them a proper supply of bread; and consequently that they would be necessitated to procure some on the other side of the lake, whither they were going. In reference to this circumstance he bade them beware of a certain kind of leaven. They, not apprehending his meaning, supposed that his words were to be taken in a *literal* sense: but our Lord, bringing to their remembrance the miraculous supplies of bread which he had recently and repeatedly afforded them, shewed them, that his caution had a *spiritual* import, and that it referred, not to bread, but to certain pernicious doctrines, of which they were to beware.

We propose,

I. To shew what the caution refers to—

If the characters of the Pharisees and the Sadducees be duly considered, it will appear that our Lord cautioned his disciples against,

1. A formal, hypocritical religion—

[The Pharisees laid a very great stress on forms; and multiplied them, not only beyond what the law of Moses prescribed, but even to the subversion of moral duties^a.

At

^a Mark vii. 8—13.

At the same time they were extremely negligent in matters of more importance^b. Amidst their high professions of religion, they sought only the applause of men^c, and their own temporal advantage^d. With respect to real piety, they were not only destitute of it^e, but adverse to it in the highest degree^f. Some few among them indeed were more upright^g; but in general they were proud, worldly, hypocritical^h.

And what is the religion of the generality amongst ourselves? Do not the greater part of those who appear to respect religion, rest in some outward observances? They attend the public worship; they go to the table of the Lord; they read the Scriptures occasionally, and say their prayers at stated seasons: but their hearts are glued to the world; and they are more anxious to be thought religious than to be so, and to gain the applause of man than to secure the honour that cometh of God.

Whether such a state can be acceptable to God; judge yeⁱ.]

2. An indifference about all religion—

[The Sadducees were the free-thinkers of the day: they denied the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul^k; and formed their notions of religion without any just regard to the holy Scriptures. Whatever was contrary to their preconceived opinions, they ridiculed as enthusiasm^l. Their lives, as might be expected, were in perfect consistency with their sentiments: they lived, almost as much as the Heathen themselves, “without God in the world.”

Behold in them, as in a mirror, the present generation! The rich, the gay, the men of learning and philosophy, are too generally of this description. Though they have never searched the Scriptures for themselves, they are as confident of the truth of their sentiments as they could be, if they had laboured ever so diligently to ascertain the mind of God. They laugh at all serious religion; and represent the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of a true Christian, as symptoms of melancholy, and as the offspring of a heated imagination.

Can we wonder that our blessed Lord cautioned his Disciples against such a state as this? Or can any of us be too much on our guard against it?]

The

^b Matt. xxii. 23.

^c Matt. v. 20.

^d Phil. iii. 5, 6.

^e Acts xxiii. 8.

^f ib. ver. 5—7.

^g Matt. xxiii. 13, 31. with Acts xiii. 50.

^h Matt. xxiii. 25—28.

ⁱ Acts xvii. 32.

^j ib. xiv. 25.

^k Luke xvi. 15.

The propriety of this caution will further appear, while we proceed,

II. To assign some reasons for it—

We shall not insist on any reasons that were peculiar to the Apostles; but touch rather on those that are applicable to every age. The caution is necessary at all times:

1. Because of our proneness to the evils we are guarded against—

[We need only notice the habits of all around us, from youth to manhood, and from maturity to old age; we shall then see to what every man is by nature inclined. Pleasure beguiles the earlier periods of life, and care corrodes our advanced or declining years. Nor is this peculiar to any time or place. In these respects, human nature is every where, and at all times, the same. Some indeed are more inclined to Pharisaic pride, and others to Sadducean indifference: and it is common to see persons, after a life of dissipation, passing from one to the other of these states. But where do we find those who are of themselves inclined to unreserved piety? Who ever was by nature humble and contrite? Who ever by nature hated all kinds of sin, and delighted in the exercises of vital godliness? Instances of early piety, it is true, may be found: but their piety was the fruit of the Spirit, and not the product of unassisted nature.

Is not this then a reason why the caution should be given? Surely, if all our natural propensities lead to one or other of the evils against which we are cautioned, it becomes us to be on our guard against them: nor can any expressions be too strong to warn us of our danger^m.]

2. Because of the fatal tendency of the evils themselves—

[The nature of “leaven” is to ferment till it has pervaded and changed the whole mass into which it is put. And well may these errors be designated by such a name. We have seen already that the heart of man by nature is impregnated with dispositions adverse to true religion. And how do these dispositions operate? Do they not work incessantly, till they vitiate the whole man? Do they not blind our understanding, and pervert our will, and sensualize

^m The words of our text are very emphatical, *ὁρᾶτε καὶ προσέχετε* and in a parallel passage our Lord says, (Luke xii. 1.) *πρῶτον προσέχετε*, i. e. *above all things*.

sualize our affections, and cause every part of our conduct to savour of ungodliness? Behold also in what manner they operate on those who turn away from the truth! For a season they have felt the influence of a better leaven, the grace of God: but, being drawn aside by temptation, they begin again to yield to their former corruptions: how soon do they lose all their spirituality of mind, and become formal in their devotions, and indifferent at least, if not also adverse, to all which they before esteemed and relished! Whoever has observed the rapid and melancholy change which is often wrought in professors of religion through the influence of this leaven; will see cause enough why every disciple of Christ should be cautioned against it.]

3. Because of their ultimate effect—

[What must be the issue of a life spent in Pharisaic pride or Sadducean indifference, it is almost needless to suggest. But surely every man's own reflection should make him careful how he admits such leaven into his soul, or yields to its malignant influence: for eternal happiness and eternal misery are too important to be trifled with: the very word *eternity* is sufficient to make every man thoughtful and cautious.]

We will now endeavour,

III. To point out the means whereby it may be rendered effectual for our preservation—

Doubtless it is the Spirit of God only that can apply the word to our souls: and therefore we must above all things implore his almighty aid. But it may be useful to suggest some other hints for the carrying into effect the caution in the text.

1. Get your souls deeply impressed with the principles of the Gospel—

[The Gospel is "the rod of God's strength," where-with he has wrought the most stupendous miracles; and it is that which he delights to make effectual to our salvation. Indeed there is something in its fundamental principles which is admirably calculated to counteract the influence of this leaven. It declares to us our lost estate; and proposes to us a Saviour, who bought us with his blood. Now who that is duly sensible of his guilt and danger, will yield to indifference? Who that discerns the fulness and excellency of Christ, will rest in any mere forms for his

his acceptance with God? Who, in short, that beholds the wonders of redeeming love, will harbour that accursed leaven that would rob him of all its benefits? Only let us come to God through Christ, and the love of Christ will constrain us to "purge out," as far as possible, every atom of "the old leaven."

2. Be careful whom you choose as your associates—

[A man will, for the most part, drink into the spirit of his associates. Are they formal and worldly, or infidel and contemptuous? he can scarcely hope to escape the infection: "evil communications will corrupt good manners:" and "a little leaven will leaven the whole lump." If, on the other hand, his companions be living in the fear of God, he will be instructed by their conversation, and edified by their example. The inference from this is clear. We need not to be often warned against exposing ourselves to the influence of a pestilential disorder. Why then should we not beware of the contagion of sin and sinners? Surely in proportion as the soul is of more value than the body, our circumspection in reference to spiritual things should exceed that which we use respecting the things that pertain to the present life. With the Apostle then we say, "Come out from among the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing:" and let your associates be, like David's, "the excellent of the earth, in whom was all his delight."]

3. Endeavour to realize the thoughts of the future judgment—

[In the last day every thing will appear in its proper colours. Vital godliness will then no longer be seen through the medium of prejudice: its light will shine out of obscurity; and its excellence will be universally acknowledged. Then too the Sadducean scoffers and the Pharisaic formalists will find how awfully they have been deluded. "Evil will no more be put for good, nor good for evil;" but the quality of every man's actions will be infallibly determined, and a suitable recompence will be given to him, either in the joys of heaven or the miseries of hell. What can ever influence us, if such an awful consideration as this fail to put us on our guard? Could we but keep alive in our hearts the expectation of that day, we should determine, through grace, to think and act for ourselves: we should

* 1 Cor. xv. 33.

• Gal. v. 9.

† 2 Cor. vi. 17.

‡ Ps. xvi. 3.

should "not follow a multitude to do evil;" but should take a decided part in the cause of Christ; we should not participate "the leaven of error or hypocrisy," but eat "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth".]

† Luke xii. 1.

* 1 Cor. v. 6—8.

DCCIX.

PETER'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST REWARDED.

Matt. xvi. 15—19. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

WHILST some are laying an undue stress upon the smaller differences which subsist between Christians, others put all the Christian world together in one indiscriminate mass; conceiving, that those who are one in name are one also in reality. But both of these parties are wrong: for the differences about Church government, and about some abstruser doctrines of our religion, are of very little signification before God, and ought to be maintained by us with moderation and mutual concessions: whereas those differences which respect our attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ are of infinite importance; they put asunder the various classes of Christians, and either prove or disprove their very title to the name. Our blessed Lord has strongly marked this in a conversation which he held with his Disciples. He asked them, What notions the generality of his professed followers entertained concerning him? To this they replied, that some supposed him to be John the Baptist; others,

others, Elijah; others, Jeremiah, or some other of the ancient Prophets risen from the dead. Then he put to them the interrogation in our text, and inquired, Whom *they* supposed him to be? The answer which Jesus received on this occasion, was quite satisfactory to him, and met with tokens of his most decided approbation. This answer formed the great line of distinction between those who were merely nominal disciples, and those who were so in spirit and in truth.

In our further consideration of this passage we shall notice;

I. Peter's confession of Christ—

On many occasions had the Disciples, either individually or collectively, acknowledged Jesus to be the true Messiah^a. On one occasion in particular, they affirmed it with a more than ordinary confidence^b. But this confession being so signally noticed by our Lord himself, we shall embrace this opportunity of considering it more fully.

Peter here justly represents the character of Christ:

1. His high origin—

[The term "Son of God" was understood by the Jews as of so high an import, that when Jesus claimed that title, he was considered as affecting an equality with Jehovah, and actually "making himself God^c." In this sense Peter acknowledged him to be, not a mere man, but infinitely above all created beings, "Emmanuel, God with us," even "God over all, blessed for evermore." Peter knew that the Father at his baptism had borne witness to him by an audible voice from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He had even been an eye-witness of such a manifestation of his glory, as had convinced him fully, that he *was* God; and at the same time he had heard precisely the same testimony to him from heaven, which had been before given at his baptism. The remembrance of this was never effaced from his mind; insomuch that,

many

^a John i. 49. & xi. 27. & Matt. xiv. 33.

^b John vi. 69.; in the discussion of which passage, we have mentioned only in a transient way.

^c John x. 30, 33, 36.

many years afterwards, he referred to it as affording to his mind a demonstration that Christ was possessed of more than human majesty and glory^d. And on other occasions also we are assured, that his Disciples "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father^e." This part of Peter's confession then must be understood as equivalent to that declaration of another Apostle, that "the Father hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person^f."]

2. His Divine mission—

["Thou art *the Christ*," the very person promised from the foundation of the world. Thou art "the Seed of the woman, that is to bruise the serpent's head;" "the Seed of Abraham, in whom all nations are to be blessed;" "the Shiloh that was to come before that the sceptre should finally depart from Judah:" "the Son of David, that shall reign over his kingdom for ever and ever." Thou art He "of whom Moses and the Prophets have written" so much, and in whom all that they have written shall be accomplished. It is true, Lord, we have but a very indistinct knowledge of thee at present; but we know enough to be assured, that thou art "the Christ," the Saviour of the world. This is the full persuasion of us all. As for those persons with whom others would identify thee, they were but thy servants, sent to prepare the world for thy coming: they were as little meteors in their day; but thou art "the bright and morning star," or rather, "the Sun of righteousness that is arisen upon us, with healing in thy wings." In thee we recognize both "the root and offspring of David," "David's Son and David's Lord:" in thee we acknowledge that Divine person, of whom God has said, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee^g;" and of whom Daniel speaks, as "Messiah, the Prince, who should make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousnessⁱ."]

Though our Lord knew beforehand what Peter's answer would be, he speaks of it as if surprised, and with peculiar approbation: which leads us to notice,

II. The

^d Luke ix. 28—35. with 2 Pet. i. 16.—18.

^e John i. 14.

^f Heb. i. 2, 3.

^g The force of the article is omitted in our translation, but should certainly have been marked.

^h Ps. ii. 7.

ⁱ Dan. ix. 24, 25.

II. The commendation with which it was honoured—

Our Lord declares that no man could have such views of him unless he were taught of God—

[The prejudices of men were so strong in favour of a temporal Messiah, that no man could overcome them, unless he were enabled by the special assistance of God himself. And though the miracles of our Lord appeared to justify his pretensions to that office, yet his low condition in life, and the universal rejection of him by the great and learned, were a stumbling-block which no man of himself was able to remove. If indeed the Scriptures had been carefully examined, and compared with all that was accomplished in Christ, they were even then sufficient to establish the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ. But no man had eyes to see this truth, till the veil was removed from his heart, and his understanding was enlightened by the Spirit of God. And thus it is at this day: we say not, that any man is to expect a new revelation, or to be inspired in the way that the Apostles were; *this* is not now to be expected by any man, the canon of revelation being completed, and God having made known all that is necessary for our salvation: but “our understandings (like those of the Apostles) must be opened, to understand the Scriptures;” nor till we are taught of God can we ever have that view of Christ which is exhibited in the text. We may, it is true, obtain a *speculative* view of Christ’s person and office from books and the teaching of men; but a *spiritual* and *practical* view of them, none but God himself can give us. We notice in Peter’s confession an *acquiescence*, an *affiance*, an *exultation* in the truths he utters: and *that* is the view which “flesh and blood cannot reveal unto us, and which can be revealed only by our heavenly Father.” To this Divine agency the Apostles ascribed all their knowledge of Christ^k; and they unequivocally declare that no human Being can derive it from any other source: “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost^l.”]

He congratulates Peter on the clear knowledge which he possessed—

[Well might our Lord reply, “Blessed art thou, Simon;” for blessed indeed he was, in having such views as these: he was blessed in them, whether we regard them as *means* of obtaining the Divine favour, or as *evidences* of having obtained

* 1 John v. 20.

^l 1 Cor. xii. 3.

obtained it. On such a knowledge of Christ all his prospects of eternal happiness depended: "Thus to know Christ is life eternal"—— But, inasmuch as the possession of it evinced that he had been taught of God, it shewed that God had a favour towards him, and had "set him apart for his own" "peculiar treasure:" this very gift was to him a pledge and earnest of future blessings. What then could constitute a man blessed, if this did not? or what can rob a man of blessedness, who is possessed of such views, and such desires? I ask not whether you be living in the enjoyment of temporal honours, or even of necessary comforts: if you resemble Peter, you are blessed, though you should be as poor and destitute as Lazarus himself; "Blessed are your eyes, if they see, and your ears, if they hear," these glorious, these heavenly truths.]

But we are further called to notice,

III. The distinction with which they were rewarded—

What was here spoken to Peter referred *primarily*, but not *exclusively*, to him. The other Apostles united with Peter in the confession; and our Lord comprehended them also in the commendation and distinction conferred upon him: yet, inasmuch as Peter had manifested a pre-eminent zeal in so directly and confidently acknowledging Christ, he was honoured in some respects with a peculiar and pre-eminent reward. Our Lord promised him,

1. That he should lay the foundation of the Christian Church—

[Christ had before given to Peter the name of "Cephas," which in *the Syriac* language is of the same import with "Peter" in *the Greek*: they both mean, "a Rock"^m. Now says our Lord, Thou hast acknowledged me to be the Christ; and I acknowledge thee to be justly and deservedly named "Peter:" nay, in reference to thy name, I declare that I will build my Church on this confession which thou hast madeⁿ; and

^m John i. 42.

ⁿ As far as we suppose Peter himself to be that rock, we must understand it as relating, not to himself *personally*, but to *the truth he had uttered*. CHRIST, personally considered, is the only true foundation on which the Church is built: (1 Cor. iii. 11.) Prophets and Apostles were such, only as proclaiming his word, on which mankind were to found their hopes. (Eph. ii. 20.) It

and though the power and policy of hell^o will be exerted to destroy my Church, they shall never prevail, either against the Church itself, or against any individual that is founded on the truth which thou hast uttered^p——— The work is mine; “*I will build it:*” but the foundation shall be that which is now laid by thee: and as long as thy name shall be known in the world, thou shalt be remembered as a bold champion for the truth, and as having even at this early period laid the foundation on which my Church shall stand for ever.]

2. That he should be a principal instrument in establishing and governing the Church—

[Keys were used as an emblem of power; and the person invested with them, had the controul and management of the house or state committed to him. Hence of Eliakim, who was to succeed Shebna, the treasurer, in his high office, it is said, “The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open^q.” And a similar metaphor is used in reference to Christ, to whom the government of the Church is exclusively committed^r. Now, says our Lord, “I will give unto thee, Peter, the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” We have not the smallest reason to believe that there was any *exclusive* power given to Peter; (nor, if there had been, is there any mention of its being transferred to the bishops and popes of Rome as his successors:) but there was a most honourable distinction conferred upon him, namely, that of opening the Church both to Jews and Gentiles; the former of which he did on the day of Pentecost; and the latter when, in consequence of repeated

is possible that Christ might point to himself as that rock; (just as he did on another occasion, John ii. 19, 21.) but still this truth, *that he is the Messiah, the Son of God*, is the one foundation of all our hopes.

° By “the gates of hell” some understand “*death*,” and consider the expression as intimating, that though *death* cuts off individual Believers, it shall never extirpate them from the earth: there shall always be a holy seed to serve the Lord. And even the persons who are removed by *death* shall rise again, and, having triumphed over death, shall reign with Christ in glory for evermore. But we prefer the sense we have given to the words. The gates of cities constituted in a great measure their strength; and they were the places where public assemblies were held, and justice was administered. Hence “the gates of hell” might well signify the power and policy of hell.

^p Jer. i. 19.

^q Isai. xxii. 20—22.

^r Rev. iii. 7.

repeated visions, he went and preached the Gospel to Cornelius and his company^s. But besides this, our Lord told him also that whatever he should bind on earth should be bound in heaven, and whatsoever he should loose on earth, should be loosed in heaven." Though Peter, in his conduct, was fallible, and actually fell into both sins and errors, yet, as inspired of God to preach and write for the edification of the Church, he was infallible: and his word, whether it related to doctrine or discipline, has been a standard of truth in every age. In this indeed the other disciples are united with him^t: and to this hour, whatever is declared by them to be lawful or unlawful, to raise men to heaven or to consign them over to perdition, is confirmed and ratified in heaven, and shall be so to all eternity. And if any Church admit or expel members agreeably to their word, such admission or expulsion will be accompanied with a corresponding acceptance or rejection before the throne of God^u.

Such was the distinction conferred on this favoured servant of the Lord: and in this was fulfilled that universal promise, "Them that honour me I will honour."] From this important subject we may LEARN,

1. How to attain the knowledge of Christ—

[Reading and human instruction are good in their place; but they are not of themselves effectual: we must have "the unction of the Holy One that must teach us all things," or else we shall, after all, continue ignorant of the truth of God. It is "the Spirit alone that can guide us into all truth." Hence we are directed by Solomon to "lift up our voice for understanding, as well as to search for her as for hid treasures:" and St. Paul prays for the Ephesian Church, that God would give them the Spirit of *wisdom and revelation* in the knowledge of Christ, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened^x." If therefore we would attain this knowledge, let us not lean to our own understanding, or look to "flesh and blood to reveal it to us," but pray unto God to "shine into our hearts to give it us^y."]]

2. How to improve it—

[Let us be ready on all proper occasions to "confess Christ before men." How astonishing is it that any should be ashamed of Christ, ashamed to acknowledge him as their Lord and Saviour! What is there to be ashamed of in loving

^s Acts ii. & x.

^t John xx. 23.

^u Matt. xviii. 18.

^x Eph. i. 17, 18.

^y 2 Cor. iv. 6.

loving him, serving him, rejoicing in him? Shall wicked men be so daring as to "glory in their shame," and shall we be so pusillanimous as to be ashamed of our glory? O let it never be: let us, like Peter, confess Christ; and then, like Peter, we shall be confessed by him: and no sooner shall we say to him, "Thou art Christ, my Lord," than he will say, Thou art Simon, my servant and my friend. Even "before his Father and his holy angels will he acknowledge us" as *his*, and proclaim us "blessed."]

3. How to secure all the benefits dependent on it—

[Opposition we must expect from earth and hell; but he will be our succour and defence. He has said, that none shall prevail against us; and we have only to plead his promise, and rest confidently on his word. Whom did he ever disappoint? "Who ever trusted in him and was confounded?" Who ever expected the written word to be accomplished, and did not find God true to his engagements? No, verily: what has been bound on earth, has been bound in heaven, and what has been loosed on earth, has been loosed in heaven. "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail." In the midst of all our conflicts then we may begin the Apostle's triumphant song^z, and continue it in all our diversified conditions, till we commence "the Song of Moses and of the Lamb" in heaven.]

^z Rom. viii. 33—39.

DCCX.

PETER'S MISTAKEN TENDERNESS REPROVED.

Matt. xvi. 21—23. *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

IN nothing is Divine wisdom more necessary than in judging what regard is to be had to times and circumstances: for, if we will not exert ourselves

selves till every difficulty is removed; we shall scarcely ever act at all: and, on the other hand, if we precipitately attempt to effect at once all that may appear desirable, we shall often defeat our best intentions. Our blessed Lord intended to reveal himself fully to his Disciples; but he would not do it at first, because they were not able to bear it: and when he had acknowledged himself to them to be the Messiah, he forbade them to divulge it; because he saw, that the knowledge of it would lead the people to proclaim him king, and thereby stir up all the power of the Romans to destroy him. Nor were the Apostles themselves sufficiently instructed yet awhile to represent that truth to others. They still thought of nothing but a temporal Messiah: and therefore, when our Lord began to predict his own sufferings and death, Peter would not hear of any such things; but presumptuously told his Master, that such events neither could, nor should, take place.

I. *The rebuke which this brought upon him*, will be a profitable subject for our consideration—

His offence was certainly heinous—

[Our Lord had now spoken plainly and openly of his approaching death and resurrection. He had done so on purpose to counteract the erroneous expectations of his Disciples, and at the same time to prepare their minds for the approaching events. We grant that such predictions must have staggered them exceedingly, considering what their views and expectations were: but did it become Peter to contradict him, and to declare that such events should never come to pass? He had but that instant before confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Why then did he not believe his assertions? Why did he presume to set up his own wisdom against that of his Divine Master? We give him credit indeed for expressing himself with tenderness and affection^a; but it became him to learn, not to teach; to submit, and not to dictate.]

In

^a προσλαβόμενος, Taking him kindly and affectionately by the hand. Compare Rom. xiv. 1..

In the reproof the peculiar enormity of it was pointed out—

[Two things in particular our Lord specified as deserving the severest reprehension. One was, *that he was casting a stumbling-block in his Master's way*. Jesus Christ had come from the bosom of his Father to redeem mankind by his own precious blood. But Peter, through false tenderness, would have had him spare himself, and prefer his own personal ease to the salvation of a ruined world: he would have persuaded Jesus to set aside all the counsels of the Father, to violate his own covenant engagements, to rescind all his own gracious purposes, and to leave mankind to perish in their sins, rather than submit to those sufferings which were necessary for the accomplishment of the great scheme of redemption. What could Satan himself wish for more than this? Hence our Lord was filled with indignation against him, and addressed him in the very terms in which he had once addressed the tempter in the wilderness: "Get thee behind me, Satan."^a "however much I respect thee in general, I regard thee in this matter, not as a friend, but as an *adversary*^b; not as an Apostle, but as *Satan* himself, speaking in and by thee:" the tendency of thy speech is to put *a stumbling-block in my way*: "thou art an offence unto me."

The other thing which our Lord condemned him for was, *that he manifested a carnal and worldly spirit*. God expects that his creatures should seek only his glory; and that personal consideration should be of no weight with them in comparison of that. But men prefer their own ease and honour, and are content to glorify God only so far as they can consistently with their own temporal comfort. Now, says our Lord, "You are not savouring of the things of God, but of those that are of men;" and are wishing me to act upon these low and carnal principles, instead of on those high principles which become my work and office. In this view therefore, as well as in the former, thou deservest no other name than that of "Satan." It is *his* great aim to banish from the world that supreme regard for God which men ought universally to feel; and thou, in the advice thou hast given, hast shewn thyself to be under his influence, and hast, to the utmost of thy power, been furthering his designs. I would have thee therefore,

^a This is the meaning of the word "Satan."

^c σατανᾶλον.

therefore, and all my other Disciples, know that I am greatly displeased with thee on this occasion^d.]

Without dwelling longer on the occurrence itself, we shall proceed to observe, that,

II. *The instruction to be gathered from it* is also peculiarly worthy of our attention—

And here there is much that comes home to the business and bosoms of mankind. We may see in this little history,

1. How to estimate the love of Christ—

[The sufferings which awaited Jesus were such as no finite creature could have borne: yet when intreated to shun them, he not only refused to listen to the advice, but reproved it with a severity that he never used on any other occasion: "What! Spare myself? Avoid the sufferings that are necessary to expiate the guilt of men, and to satisfy the demands of law and justice? How can I leave mankind to perish in their sins? I cannot endure the thought: and I account him who suggests it to me as no better than Satan himself: yes, even the highly favoured Peter appears to me in the light of that malignant fiend, when he would damp the ardour of my love to man, or discourage the execution of my plans for his redemption."]

View the answer in this light, and say, whether his "love was not such as many waters could not quench, neither could floods drown it?" Towards those who inflicted his sufferings we behold nothing but kindness. To the man that betrayed him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" To those who came to apprehend him, "Whom seek ye?" To Peter, when denying him with oaths and curses, he spoke not a word, but gave him a look of pity and compassion. To his blood-thirsty murderers he also meekly submitted, praying and apologizing for them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And, after all ranks and orders of men in Jerusalem had satiated their malice in destroying him, he commanded his "Gospel to be preached to all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem.*" But when he was intreated to avoid those sufferings, his indignation was extreme; nor were any terms too strong to express it. Well indeed might it be said of his love, that "it passeth knowledge." We admire the firmness with which St. Paul resolved to meet the sufferings that awaited

^d Our Lord, previous to his reply, turned about, and looked in a very significant way on all his other Disciples. Mark viii. 33.

awaited him^c: but this was nothing in comparison of Christ's love to us.]

2. How to requite his love—

[On this our Lord insisted with peculiar emphasis. In the words following the text it is said, "*Then said Jesus unto his Disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself,*" &c. But another Evangelist informs us, that he called the people to him on this occasion, that they, together with his Disciples, might hear what was so highly interesting, so universally obligatory, and so unquestionably right and reasonable^f. He expatiated on the duties he required of all his followers, and declared, that all who would approve themselves to him, must deny themselves after his example, and be willing to lay down their lives for him^g. This at first perhaps sounds harsh: but if Jesus laid down his life for us, and was so intent upon it that he resented in the highest degree any suggestion that could be made against it, what does he not deserve at our hands? If he did that for us who were his enemies, what should not we be ready to do for him, our Lord and Saviour? Truly, if we had a thousand lives, we might well sacrifice them all for him—— Let us not then be ashamed to confess him, or afraid to suffer for him: but let us "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach," and "esteem the reproach of Christ greater treasures than all the riches of the world."]

3. How to act towards those who offer us their friendly advice—

[We have before shewn how we are to act when menaced by the avowed enemies of Christ. But how are we to act towards those who profess themselves his friends? I answer, *Try their counsel, and examine carefully whether it savour of the things of God or of man.* Bring it to the test of Scripture, even though they should be Apostles or even angels that offer it. That persons in their general habits are pious, is no reason that we should implicitly follow their advice in every thing; for the best of men are fallible, and liable to be biassed by their interests or passions: and if Satan can gain over them to his interests, he will make a special use of them for assaulting the holiest of men. By Eve he assaulted Adam; and Job also by his wife; and our Lord himself by his favourite Apostle, Peter. I say then, Whatever advice be given you, try it by the touchstone of God's word: if it savour of carnal ease

^c Acts xxi. 11—13.

^f Mark viii. 34.

^g ib. ver. 35—38.

ease and worldly prudence, beware how you follow it: if, on the contrary, it evidently have the glory of God in view, beware how you reject it. The direction of God himself is, "Try the spirits, whether they are of God:" "To the word and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them:" "Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." We grant that, in many cases, it may not be easy to discern between good and evil; and the affection of the adviser may blind our eyes to the sinfulness of the advice. But, if we ourselves are habitually savouring the things of God, we shall have a spiritual discernment, which, like the senses of taste and smell, will enable us to perceive the noxious qualities of things, which in their outward appearance are good and wholesome. But it is the privilege of all to have God himself for their guide: look therefore to him, and "he will direct your paths:" "He will guide you by his counsel, till at last he bring you to glory."]

DCCXI.

CHRIST'S COMPASSION AND MAN'S OBSTINACY
CONTRASTED.

Matt. xxiii. 37. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*

THE enmity of the human heart against God, visible as it is in all our conduct, is discoverable in nothing more than in the treatment which has been shewn in all ages to his faithful servants. One might well expect, that persons commissioned by the Governor of the Universe to instruct and reform mankind, should be welcomed with every expression of love and gratitude. But historic fact precluded a possibility of reply to that pungent question of our Lord, "Which of the Prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" Nevertheless, God in infinite mercy, after a host of messengers had in succession been cruelly put to death, vouchsafed to send his only dear Son, with

with credentials indisputable, with authority unparalleled, with compassion infinite. Yet was not even his ministry successful. The obduracy of man withstood all his kind solicitations; and constrained him, with his dying breath, to testify against his devoted country as self-ruined and self-condemned.

The words before us will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The tender compassion of Christ—

The simile by which our Lord illustrates his own tenderness, is admirably calculated to impress and edify our minds. It is familiar to all, and therefore intelligible to the meanest capacity: at the same time it gives us as just an idea of parental anxiety as any image can convey. A hen, observing a bird of prey hovering over her young, instantly sounds an alarm, and calls them to her for protection. Thus our blessed Lord warned sinners in the days of his flesh: and thus he still warns them,

1. By his providence—

[All the dispensations of Providence, whether relating to the world at large or to ourselves in particular, have a voice which may be heard with ease, and interpreted with certainty. Whether they be of a more painful or pleasing nature, they may alike be regarded as calls to turn from sin, and to seek our happiness in God. And if we had been as attentive to the dictates of reason as the chickens are to the impulse of their natural instinct, we should long since have turned at God's reproofs, "and been led by his goodness to repentance."]

2. By his word—

[What are all the warnings, the invitations, the promises of the Gospel, but so many expressions of that tender regard which Christ bears to his people? Surely, if we be not more deaf than the adder, we cannot but acknowledge, that in all these Christ is speaking to us, and entreating us to flee from the wrath to come. Moreover, whenever the Ministers of the Gospel have spoken to us

in

in the name of Christ, our adorable Saviour has addressed us by their mouth.]

3. By his Spirit—

[There is no man so obdurate, but he has felt, and perhaps still occasionally feels; some convictions and remonstrances within his own bosom, some secret admonitions to repent and turn to God. We call these properly the voice of conscience; but they are also the voice of Christ, that "small still voice" whereby he invites us to seek his face. And in them, no less than in the written word, we have a demonstration of the concern which Christ has for the welfare of our souls, and of his solicitude to gather us under the shadow of his wings.]

But these efforts, instead of being requited as they ought, afford us only an occasion of contemplating,

II. The unrelenting obstinacy of man—

In the midst of all these overtures of mercy, man continues insensible, and,

1. Denies that any danger exists—

[The Saviour beholds the law denouncing its curse against us, and justice unsheathing its sword to enforce its awful sanctions, and hell opening to swallow us up quick, and the fallen angels, as ministers of God's vengeance, ready to concur in executing upon us the punishment we deserve. Of these things he warns us; but we, like the inhabitants of Sodom, laugh at the impending judgments, and, because we do not see them with our eyes, deny their existence. How lamentable is it, that we should be more stupid and incredulous than the brute creation; and that our conduct, instead of being suited to the nobler faculties we enjoy, should be in perfect contrast with theirs!]

2. Contents himself with false refuges—

[When we can no longer deny the existence of danger, we then look out for such refuges as will be most congenial with our natural feelings, and will leave us most at liberty to follow our own ways. Many speedily present themselves to our view. Some repentance, some reformation, some alms-deeds, some religious observances, afford, as we imagine, ample security for our souls, while yet they require no great exercise of self-denial in fleeing to them. But in choosing these refuges of lies, we renounce the Saviour:

Saviour: we turn from that adorable "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people must be;" and expose ourselves to inevitable, everlasting destruction.]

3. Prefers temporal and carnal pleasures to those which are spiritual and eternal—

[When the necessity of fleeing to Christ for refuge is acknowledged, the vanities of the world are suffered to stand in competition with our duty to him, and are preferred before the security which he offers. Thus the Saviour's calls are disregarded. The chickens, however occupied in picking up their food, will not disregard their parent's call: but sinful man is obstinately bent on the prosecution of some favourite pursuit; and the complaint in the text is fully verified, "How often would I, but ye would not!"]

Let us IMPROVE this subject in a way of,

1. Inquiry—

[Have we ever felt our danger of perishing, and taken shelter under our Redeemer's wings? We can be at no loss to answer this question, if only we will consult the records of our own conscience. The necessity of fleeing thus to Christ is plainly intimated in the image before us, and attested by innumerable other passages of Holy Writ. Know then, that if your own hearts condemn you, you have an evidence within yourselves that you are yet exposed to the wrath of God. O tremble at the thought, and flee without delay to the refuge set before you!]

2. Admonition—

[It is to little purpose to deny our danger. If the helpless chickens should disregard their parent's call, under the idea that the warning given them was the result of ungrounded fear, would their denial of the danger free them from it? Would not their presumption bring upon them the very destruction which they refused to shun? Thus it will be with those who despise the Saviour's voice. Their security will be their ruin. Nor will they be at all more safe, if they content themselves with coming nearer to him in the ordinances, while they defer hiding themselves altogether under the shadow of his wings. It is there alone that they can find protection; and if they be not "found in him," the "wrath of God will surely come upon them to the uttermost." Be thankful then, that, after so many calls have been despised, the voice of Mercy is yet sounding in your ears.]

3. Encourage-

3. Encouragement—

[Whom is it that the Saviour calls? The innocent, the good, the virtuous? No; but those who had imbrued their hands in the blood of all his martyred servants: and these he calls with tenderest compassion, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem:" to these he appeals, that he had renewed his invitations to them times without number, and that, if they perish, they will be the sole authors of their own destruction: "How often would I have gathered you, but ye would not!" Know then, Beloved, that your former sins, however numerous or heinous, shall be no bar to your acceptance, if only you will flee to Christ. Over you he weeps, as he once did over the murderous Jerusalem; and he declares unto you, that "Whosoever cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out." Remember that, if you perish, it will not be through any want of willingness in Christ to save you: and that that very consideration, which is now so encouraging, will one day fill you with inconceivable anguish; "*Christ would, but I would not.*" O let not that reflection be suffered to embitter your eternal state; but now let your reluctance be overcome; and obey the voice that warns you only for your good.]

DCCXII.

CAUTION AGAINST DECLENSION IN RELIGION.

Matt. xxiv. 12, 13. *Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

THESE words are a part of the discourse which our Lord held with four of his Disciples in private, after he had retired from the Temple to the Mount of Olives*. Being in full view of the Temple, his Disciples were struck with the magnificence of its appearance, and expressed to him their admiration of it: from whence he took occasion to foretell the speedy destruction of it, and to give them signs whereby they should ascertain the approach of the judgments which awaited their whole nation. At the same time he gave them instructions for their

* Compare Mark xiii. 1—4. with Matt. xxiv. 1, 2.

their own support and comfort under all the trials which they themselves should endure previous to that time. He told them what evil treatment they should meet with from the enemies of his Gospel; and what difficulties they should encounter from his pretended friends. Their trials *from without* we considered in the last discourse^b: those *from within* we propose for our present consideration.

In the words before us our Lord suggests to his Disciples,

I. The danger of spiritual declension—

Independent of the proneness of man at all times to backslide from God, there is a danger arising to us from the conduct of those with whom we stand connected. The bitterness of persecution, or abounding of corruption, may operate to abate our zeal in the service of our God; but the falls and offences of those who profess religion have a peculiar tendency to discourage the people of God; and it is to this, we apprehend, our Lord more especially refers.

Such events must be expected in every age—

[If we consult the holy Scriptures, we shall find that, even in the Apostolic age, multitudes who were once hopeful declined from the ways of God, and made shipwreck both of faith and of a good conscience^c——— And what is there to prevent a recurrence of the same evils? As long as the heart of man is so evil and so treacherous, it will ever be prone to start aside from God, even as a broken bow———]

Whenever they do happen, they tend to quench the love even of the most established—

[Great disappointment is felt by all the members of the Christian Church: and every one feels a portion of that disgrace which the instability of any member brings upon the whole body. From the frailty of some, the fidelity of others begins to be questioned: evil surmisings arise: a coolness and distance are occasioned among the brethren: the communion of the saints is interrupted; and their associations

^b On Luke xxi. 17—19. which in Doddridge's Harmony of the Gospels immediately precedes the text.

^c 2 Tim. i. 15. & ii. 17. & iv. 10.

associations for holy exercises are less frequented, or less enjoyed^d. Divisions then ensue: each leader endeavours to increase the number of his partisans: and thus all that union and harmony which should characterize the family of Christ is destroyed.

Hence arises also a coldness of heart towards God himself, and a loss of fellowship with him — — — In a word, the almost inseparable effect of an irruption of iniquity into the Church of God is, that “the love of many at least, if not of all, will wax cold.” One single “root of bitterness springing up will trouble and defile many.”]

Such danger always existing, we proceed to suggest,

II. A preservative against it—

Two things are certain, namely, *That on our continuance in well-doing our salvation depends*; and, *That by our continuance in well-doing our salvation is secured*: and the consideration of these two points will, under God, prove an excellent antidote against all the dangers to which we can be exposed.

Consider then, that

1. *On our continuance in well-doing our salvation depends—*

[To this truth the whole voice of Scripture bears witness. We know full well that there are many promises made to the people of God; and that of those who have been given to Christ he will lose none. But it were a dreadful perversion of those promises, to think that we can be saved in any other way than that of “a patient continuance in well-doing^f.” We must not attempt to make void the most positive declarations of Holy Writ^g — — — but must learn, like the apostle Paul himself, to make them an incentive to unwearied watchfulness and diligence^h — — —]

2. *By our continuance in well-doing our salvation is secured—*

[The promise in our text is absolute and universal: and throughout every part of Scripture God says to us, “Be thou faithful unto death; and I will give thee a crown

^d Heb. x. 24, 25.

^e Heb. xii. 15.

^f Rom. ii. 7.

^g Ezek. xviii. 24. & xxxiii. 12, 13. Heb. x. 26, 27, 38, 39.

^h 1 Cor. ix. 27.

crown of life" — — — We need not disquiet ourselves about God's fulfilment of his promises: let us only attend to our own duties, and leave him to accomplish his own word in his own time and way. We shall find at last that "not a jot or tittle of his word has ever failed" — — — The words of our text were fulfilled literally to *every true disciple* at the destruction of Jerusalem, when *every apostate* perished. A refuge was provided for the whole body of Christians, at Pella, and a way was opened for their escape thither: and so it shall be in the day of judgment, when Christ's faithful servants *universally*, and they *only*, shall be saved.]

3. The consideration of these truths would be an effectual preservative against spiritual declension—

[Suppose iniquity to abound ever so much, what is that to *us*, except as a matter of grief and lamentation for the persons who commit it? Let the iniquity shew itself in any *persons*, or in any *degree*, it is no reason that our love to God and man should wax cold: it should rather operate as a reason for us to stir up our love to a flame, in order to impede the progress of the corruption, or at least to prevent its assaults upon our own souls; as travellers in a wilderness kindle fires around them, in order to protect themselves from the assaults of ravenous and ferocious beasts. At all events, however much any persons may injure their own souls, and endanger their own salvation, it becomes us to take care that they do not destroy or injure us — — —]

ADDRESS:

1. Let us above all things cultivate a spirit of love—

[This is the characteristic feature of all God's children: and the want of it, whatever else we may possess, proves us to be only as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbalsⁱ. A growth in this is the surest evidence of our growth in grace^k — — — and by this, more than by any thing else, is our establishment in the Divine life secured^l — — — Let us then "take care lest any root of bitterness spring up in our hearts;" and let us daily "put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness^m."]]

2. Let us beg of God the assistance of his Holy Spirit—

[The

ⁱ 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^l 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13.

^k 2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

^m Col. iii. 14.

[The consideration of our final happiness depending so entirely on our own continuance in well-doing, would be discouraging, if we did not know, that God has promised to us the aids of his Spirit; and that "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us." See how graciously the Lord supported Paul, when all his Christian friends had forsaken him in his greatest extremity: "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge: notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." Thus shall you find him present with you in every hour of trial, and be made "more than conquerors through him that loved you."]

a 2 Tim. iv. 16.

DCCXIII.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

Matt. xxv. 34, 41, 46. *Then shall the King say unto them, on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.*

IT is scarcely needful in a Christian assembly to prove that there will be a day of judgment, because no one entertains a doubt respecting it: but to impress on our minds a consideration of the judicial process, and of the eternal consequences which will instantly ensue, is of the utmost importance. Taking for granted, therefore, that there is amongst us a certain and universal expectation of that day, we shall proceed to notice the description which the Judge himself has given of it, from its commencement to its termination.

Let us call your attention to,

I. The preparatory solemnities—

These are comprised under two heads:

1. The

1. The coming of the Judge—

[Our blessed Lord is ordained to be the Judge both of the quick and dead. It is of himself that he speaks, when he says, "The Son of Man" shall come^a. As the Son of Man, he stood at the bar of Pilate; and, as the Son of Man, he will summon the universe to his tribunal. As the Son of Man, he himself was judged, condemned, executed; and, as the Son of Man, he will pass judgment on all, whether men or devils. At his first advent he appeared in the lowest state of degradation, "a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people^b;" but in that day "he will come with power and great glory," surrounded by myriads of *his* holy angels. The pomp and glory of his appearing will infinitely surpass either the lustre of Mount Tabor, or the more terrific splendor of Mount Sinai^c. His throne will be erected in the air; and the books, both "the book of his remembrance," wherein the actions of men were recorded, and the Volume of Inspiration, whereby they are to be judged, will be opened before him^d.]

2. The summoning of those who are to be judged—

["Before him shall be gathered all nations." Every creature, from Adam to the last of his descendants, shall appear in one vast assembly. Not one shall be absent: not one will be able to withstand the summons of the Almighty, or to elude his search. "The great and mighty of the earth" shall then stand on a level with the meanest beggar^e. Every one shall appear in his own proper body^f. As for the difficulty of collecting the scattered atoms of every individual, atoms that have been transformed into ten thousand different shapes, this is no difficulty with God: he who created them out of nothing by a mere act of his will, can by a similar act of volition reunite the atoms that are necessary to constitute our personal identity: and he will do it "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump:" and when the dead are raised, then, and not till then, will he change the bodies of those who are alive upon the earth, that they also, together with those who are risen, may "meet the Lord in the air^g."]

The

^a ver. 31.^b Ps. xxii. 6.^c Matt. xxiv. 30, 31. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.^d Dan. vii. 9, 10, and *thrice mentioned* Rev. xx. 12.^e Rev. vi. 15. ^f 1 Cor. xv. 38, 42. ^g 1 Thess. iv. 15—17.

The whole human race being come into the presence of their Judge, he will proceed to,

II. The trial—

There will be a strict inquiry into their respective works—

[We do not suppose that their regard to him and his salvation will be overlooked^h: but it will be ascertained by the fruits which they brought forth. If their faith was not productive of good works, it will be accounted only as the faith of devils. But what are the fruits which alone will be considered as just evidences of our love to Christ? *O that this matter were duly weighed amongst us!* It will not be asked merely, Whether we transgressed the law by grosser acts of sin, such as uncleanness, or drunkenness, or theft, or perjury, or murder; but whether we were active in doing good to our fellow-creatures *for Christ's sake?* Whether we “fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick,” and delighted ourselves in all offices of love to our fellow-creatures from a sense of love to Christ, and with a view to his gloryⁱ? Yes, on this will the salvation or condemnation of men depend. Mark it well, my Brethren. It is not for formal duties or empty professions that any will be applauded, but for active, diligent, unremitted exertions in the cause of Christ: NOR IS IT FOR SINS OF COMMISSION MERELY THAT ANY WILL PERISH, BUT FOR SINS OF OMISSION^k.]

Then will they be separated according to their true characters—

[The characters of all will then be as easily discerned as sheep are discerned from goats; and they will be separated accordingly, “The sheep on the right hand of their Judge, and the goats on his left hand.” Then will be seen two wonderful sights; the righteous, however separated from each other by trifling forms, or various sentiments on earth, all united in one body, and perfectly of one heart and mind. Nor will there be so much as one hypocrite found amongst them: the tares which now grow among the wheat will all be plucked up: the wolves in sheep's clothing will all be detected; and the whole collective mass be holy, even as God himself is holy. Then also will all the wicked be standing in one vast congregation together. Those who had mixed themselves with the saints on earth will have the mask taken away, and be made to appear

in

^h Mark xvi. 16. Heb. ii. 3.

ⁱ ver. 35, 36.

^k Compare Matt. vii. 21. with ver. 25, 27, 30. & ver. 42, 43.

in all their natural deformity; and those trembling saints who were wont to number themselves amongst them, will have had their integrity cleared, and their doubts removed: and all, whether righteous or wicked, will take their proper place, according as the evidence, adduced before their Judge, attested or disproved their piety.]

The trial closed, the Judge will proceed immediately to,

III. The sentence—

He will first address himself to those on his right hand—

[Among the reasons which might be assigned for his first pronouncing sentence on the righteous, the principal seems to be, that they are to be his assessors in judgment, and to confirm the sentence which he will pronounce upon the ungodly¹. But from the moment of their separation, what joy will fill every breast! What mutual congratulations will resound on every side! How delightful will be their anticipation of the felicity that awaits them! What smiles too will beam forth in the countenance of their Judge, when he shall turn towards them!]

In his address to them, though he mentions their good works, in order to manifest the equity of his procedure, yet he traces up all their blessedness to the sovereign grace of him, who had loved them “from before the foundation of the world.” It was the Father who had chosen them from all eternity^m, who had sent them a Saviour; who in due time had called them by his grace; and who was the true source of all the blessings they enjoyedⁿ. Hence he calls them, “Ye blessed of my Father.” In bidding them to take possession of “the kingdom prepared for them,” he marks very strongly the same idea: for he tells them to “inherit” it: by which he clearly intimates, that it was neither earned nor purchased by them, but attained through their adoption into God’s family, and their consequent regeneration by the Spirit of grace.

Surely the sound of these gracious words must pour all heaven into the souls of all to whom they are addressed.]

Then he will turn unto those upon his left hand—

[But how is his countenance now changed! What anger, what indignation flames in his eyes! And what terrible displeasure is conveyed in his voice! The grounds
of

¹ Matt. xix. 28.

^m Eph. i. 4.

ⁿ Jam. i. 17.

of their condemnation are explicitly declared. They had neglected to serve him, and to do the things that were pleasing in his sight; and therefore they are bidden to "depart accursed." And it is worthy of observation, that they are not said to be cursed of his Father: no; though the saints owe their felicity to the election of the Father, the wicked do not owe their misery to any arbitrary act of reprobation: the righteous are blessed *of the Father*; the wicked are cursed *of themselves*; it is to their own neglect of duty that they must trace their eternal condemnation: they perish, not because there was any want of mercy in God the Father, or of merit in God the Son; but because "they rejected the counsel of God," and would not accept his proffered salvation°. In this world they had said to God, "Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thy ways^p:" and in that world their Judge will reply, Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of your souls: "I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity." The place into which they are to depart was not indeed prepared for *them*, as heaven was for the saints: it was "prepared for the devil and his angels:" but as the wicked are partakers of their guilt, they shall be also of their punishment.]

Then will come,

IV. The execution—

The righteous shall be borne up into the regions of eternal bliss—

[On the pronouncing of the sentence, the heavens will be opened, and all the saints will ascend thither to take possession of their thrones. But who can conceive the happiness of those who are admitted into the presence of their God; who are placed beyond the reach of sin or sorrow, and have an eternity of blessedness before them? What praises, what adorations, and hosannas will resound through all the courts of heaven!]

The wicked shall be cast down into the regions of eternal misery—

[We attempt not to describe their misery; for it passes the power of words to express, or of imagination to conceive: but

° In this respect the text exactly accords with Rom. ix. 22, 23. where the Apostle states that the vessels of mercy were prepared for it by God; but the vessels of wrath were fitted for it by themselves.

^p Job xxi. 14.

but this we assert, that it will be truly and properly eternal. It shall co-exist with the felicity of heaven; for its duration is expressed by the very same word^r. If any doubt the eternity of hell torments, I ask, What shall ever terminate them? Will the fire that is kindled there be extinguished? or the souls that are cast into it be consumed? Or shall they be purified in the fire, and be exalted at a future period to the regions of bliss? No one of these things shall be: "The fire shall not be quenched:" "the worm of a guilty conscience shall never die:" and, instead of being improved by their misery, the sufferers will gnaw their tongues for anguish, and blaspheme that God who inflicts their punishment^s. Besides, there is a gulph fixed betwixt them and the saints in glory; so that none shall ever pass from the one place to the other, or experience the smallest change in their condition^t. How terrible will then be the state of the ungodly! How "will they call upon the hills to fall upon them, and the rocks to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb!" But, what they would not believe, they now feel to their cost; and shall feel, as long as God himself shall endure, even for ever and ever.]

INFER,

1. How desirable is it to be prepared for death and judgment!

[This is the time for preparation: the moment death arrives, our state is fixed for ever: "As the tree falleth, so it lieth." What folly then is it to procrastinate, and to defer our preparation! If death would stay for us, and we could command the influences of the Spirit, and insure repentance at the last, there were some reason for delay: but when we know not but that the next hour we may be summoned into the presence of our Judge, or that the grace we now despise shall never be offered us again, what madness is it to lose the present moment, and to trifle on the brink of such a precipice! Awake, Brethren, from your stupor; and "prepare to meet your God." Go to the Saviour, while yet there is hope concerning you: and let it be the one concern of your lives to "flee from the wrath to come."]

2. How important is it to form a just judgment of our own character!

[Suppose

^r αἰώνιον. It is in vain to say that αἰών signifies a limited period; for the duration of heaven and of hell are equal: and if we limit the one, we must the other also.

^s Mark ix. 43—48.

^t Rev. xvi. 8—11.

^u Luke xvi. 26.

[Suppose for a moment that we judge ourselves now with somewhat too great severity, what harm is done? We disquiet ourselves indeed a little more than is necessary for a few days; but we are stirred up to greater diligence and circumspection; and are stimulated to exert ourselves more earnestly for the securing of the prize. But what if we lean too much to the favourable side? It will be too late to remedy our error when once we pass into the eternal world. There is no repentance in the grave. It will be no excuse to say, "Lord, I was mistaken; I did not think so much strictness was necessary; I thought that such characters as I were safe." Now, therefore, "judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord." Inquire now, what is the tenor of your life. Do not be contented to examine whether you have committed any gross sin; but inquire whether you are running as in a race, and striving to the utmost to glorify your God by all possible acts and offices of love? Examine particularly, whether all that you do is, not to purchase heaven, but to testify your love to Christ? If you bring yourselves to any lower standard than this, you will deceive yourselves to your eternal ruin. But if, after a strict inquiry into these things, "your conscience condemn you not, then have you a scriptural confidence towards God^x."]

^u Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^x 1 John iii. 21. If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, it would be proper here to recommend the charity, and to exhort them to beneficence; but at the same time to caution them against the idea of *meriting* heaven by their alms-deeds; and to remind them, that their love must spring from faith in Christ, and be exercised simply for his sake, and to his glory.

DCCXIV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARITABLE EXERTIONS.

Matt. xxv. 35—40. *I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the*

the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

THE solemnities of the day of judgment can never be too attentively considered: and we have reason to be thankful that they are here so plainly set before us. The coming of the Judge, the summoning of the universe before his tribunal, the separation of the righteous and the wicked, and the sentence that shall be passed on all the human race; are exhibited, as it were, in this passage before our eyes. But there is one thing here specified, which is more peculiarly interesting to us, in as much as it either divests that day of all its horrors, or must cause us to look forward to it with inexpressible dread; I mean, *the ground upon which the decision will be formed*, and the doom of every individual be fixed. That the whole of our principles and conduct will be taken into consideration, there can be no doubt; but there is one point which will be inquired into, and will be regarded as a certain evidence of all the rest, namely, our activity in doing good to our fellow-creatures for Christ's sake: and, according as we shall be found to have abounded or been defective in that, will our definitive sentence be passed. This is asserted by the Judge himself: and the terms in which he has expressed it lead me to shew,

I. The proper exercises of Christian benevolence—

Love is the distinguishing feature of a true Christian—

["God is love;" and every one that is born of God, is "created anew after his image." The natural selfishness of the human heart is subdued and mortified by the grace of God; and "the new creature" desires to "live no more unto himself, but unto that Saviour who died for him." "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" is his daily inquiry. To requite the Saviour he finds impossible: and therefore he looks out for others to be the representatives of his Lord, that through them he may
manifest

714.] IMPORTANCE OF CHARITABLE EXERTIONS. 325

manifest his sense of the mercies vouchsafed unto him. He is not contented with cultivating devout affections in his heart, but endeavours to render them substantially operative towards man. In a word, he exercises faith; but it is a "faith that worketh by love."]

The poor and afflicted are the more peculiar objects of that love—

[Doubtless love, in its most extended sense, comprehends much more than mere benevolence to the poor: but it is shewn in this particularly; and, wherevèr it exists, will manifest itself in this in a more abundant measure. We have a bright example of this in the person of Job^a. So highly did he esteem these duties, that if he had been remiss in them he would have accounted himself deserving of the heaviest judgments^b. The conduct of the first Christians is not precisely of the kind we are considering; nor is it of necessity to be imitated by us: but it proves to what an extent the principle of love will carry us, if occasion require it at our hands^c. But the example of the Macedonian Churches comes home fully to the point; and shews us, that not even the deepest poverty, or the severest affliction, will preclude the exercise of self-denying kindness, when love has a just ascendant over our hearts^d. We lay the more stress on this, because it was proposed for the imitation of the whole Corinthian Church; and because the formation of such a principle, and the production of such a conduct, is the main scope and intent of the Gospel. The particulars specified in our text attest this — — — as does also that saying of the Apostle, "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^e."] .

To such exertions we may well be stimulated, if we consider,

II. The acceptableness of them to the Lord Jesus—

The Lord Jesus identifies himself with his afflicted people—

[He has sympathized with them in every period of the world. What was it but compassion that caused him to undertake the cause of fallen man? When Israel was in Egypt, he heard their cries, and pitied their sorrows^f. Whilst they sojourned in the Wilderness, "in all their afflictions

he

^a Job xxix. 11—16.

^b Job xxxi. 16—20, 22.

^c Acts iv. 32—35.

^d 2 Cor. viii. 1—4.

^e Gal. vi. 2.

^f Exod. iii. 7.

he was afflicted." In his state of humiliation, "he made himself poor for their sakes, that they through his poverty might be rich:" and now, in his exalted state, he considers their cause his own. Are they persecuted? *he*, as he told the persecuting Saul, is the person injured^s. "Whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye." Are they relieved? he tells us in the text, that every office of love shewn to men for his sake he accepts, as shewn to *him*. He esteems the meanest of his people as "a brother," and will acknowledge him as such before the assembled universe: or rather, he esteems him as a Member of his own body; in the prosperity and happiness of which the Head is no less interested than the Member itself.]

What a fund has this one declaration laid up for them in every age of the world!

[We cannot conceive any other thing which could have so forcibly interested the mind of man. The obligations which we owe to Christ infinitely exceed any thing which words can express, or imagination can conceive. Were he therefore to command any thing, the hope of pleasing him would be a strong incentive to his believing people to obey him: but when he declares, that he will accept as done for himself whatsoever is done for others in his name, methinks the diligence of all in serving him should so anticipate the wants and wishes of mankind, as almost to banish misery from the world. But, though the greatness of human miseries, and the fewness of the Lord's people, preclude the hope of such an event as this, yet this one consideration, of administering to the Lord Jesus Christ in the person of his people, animates thousands to the most ardent zeal, and carries them through the most self-denying exertions.]

If we need any further stimulus to such exercises, let us consider,

III. The importance of them to ourselves—

The issue of the final judgment depends altogether upon them. In that day they will be brought forth,

1. As an evidence of our state—

[As God has taught us to judge of the tree by its fruits, so will he himself do in the day of judgment: and, whatever may have been our professions of faith and love, he will judge of them only by the fruits which they have produced.]

^s Acts ix. 4, 5.

produced. The fruits after which he will inquire, and by which he will be determined, are those spoken of in the text. Where they are found, there must a living faith and real piety have existed^h: and, where they are not found, there must have been an entire absence of true love to Godⁱ. By this test, therefore, shall every man be tried; and according to this shall he stand or fall^k.]

2. As a justification of our sentence—

[The day of judgment is emphatically called “the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God^l.” and it is appointed, not so much for the awarding of happiness or misery to the sons of men, as for the display of God’s equity in these decisions. Much is spoken in the Scriptures of God’s having chosen men to salvation, and predestinated them to the adoption of children: and, beyond all doubt, the whole glory of man’s salvation must be given to him: but still he will evince to the whole assembled universe that there is an equity in his proceedings, and that the destinies of all exactly correspond with their moral characters. The labours of love, in which the righteous had abounded, are here produced; and those whom Christ here speaks of as “his brethren,” are ready to attest the truth of his assertions. On the other hand, the neglect imputed to the others is obvious: and though they attempt to extenuate their guilt, it is brought home to them in the completest manner; nor have they one word to utter in arrest of judgment. Thus is the righteousness of God made manifest; “he is justified in what he speaks, and clear in the judgment which he passes^m.”]

3. As a measure of our reward—

[We must not imagine that men are saved on account of any *merit* of their own. It is not possible that their works of love should ever purchase so great a reward as will then be given them. Indeed, the surprise which they express, “When saw we thee?” &c. clearly shews that they had not founded their hopes upon their own works: they had been redeemed to God by the precious blood of Christ; and in Christ they had trusted as the only Saviour of the world: but God is pleased to notice the works which they had done for his sake, and to bestow on them “a reward of grace:” nor is even a cup of cold water, which had been given to a disciple for his sake, suffered to pass without an appropriate reward. Hence we see that the more we abound in works of charity, the more exalted will

^h Jam. i. 27.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 17.

^k Jam. ii. 13.

^l Rom. ii. 5.

^m Ps. li. 4.

will be our happiness in heaven: whilst, on the other hand, the more means and opportunities of doing good we have neglected, the heavier will be our condemnation to all eternity.]

We would further IMPROVE this subject—

1. For our instruction in general—

[If such be the particular objects to be inquired into, how little prepared are most of us to meet our God! The generality think it sufficient if they do not *occasion* sorrow, though they never exert themselves diligently to *relieve* it: but let it be known and peculiarly marked, that the *omission* of these duties is of itself sufficient to condemn us; and that the sentence of condemnation that is here denounced against the wicked, refers, not to any thing which they have done, but to what they have left undone. I know, indeed, that all have not the same ability, or the same opportunity to relieve their afflicted neighbours: but have we availed ourselves of the opportunities that have been afforded us? If we have, though our efforts have been few and weak, they shall be accepted; for “if there be in us a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not:” but if we have not, let us not deceive ourselves with vain hopes; for, “as unprofitable servants, we shall be cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.”]

2. In reference to the occasion before us—

[The charity for which we plead has a near affinity with that described in our text”——— We call upon you then to assist it, by personal exertions, if you can, but at all events by liberal contributions. What would you do if Christ himself were now present, and soliciting your assistance? Would you send him away unpitied and unrelieved? Would you not rather vie with each other, who should be most forward, and most liberal in his relief? Know then that he is present, and will accept at your hands whatever you do for him. Know also, that the harvest which you will reap shall be proportioned to the seed you sow*.]

* The particulars of it should be here stated.

• 2 Cor. ix. 6.

DCCXV.

CHRIST'S APPREHENSION.

Matt. xxvi. 53, 54. *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?*

THE Christian is by profession a soldier: he is to fight a good fight, and to war a good warfare: he is not for one moment to lay aside his armour, or to make a truce with his enemies; nor is he to be satisfied with defensive operations; he must carry the war into the heart of the enemy's country, and attack his strong holds: whenever he gains a victory, he must exercise no lenity; he must not spare one single foe; he must extirpate all without exception and without mercy: he must "hew Agag in pieces before the Lord." But "the weapons of his warfare are not carnal:" his armour, whether for defence or assault, is all of heavenly temper; it is "the armour of God," in which he is clothed; and "the sword of the Spirit," with which he attacks his enemies. If he be combating with a persecuting world, then especially must he be armed with love and patience. These indeed are not arms suited to our sinful nature: the fierce and vindictive tempers of men would lead them rather to repel force by force, as Peter attempted to do in defence of his Master. But Christianity disclaims such aid: it is neither to be propagated nor maintained by such means. Our Lord has declared that "they who take the sword shall perish with the sword:" and has shewn us by his own example, that we are rather to "possess our souls in patience;" and to conquer, not by shedding the blood of others, but by suffering our own to be poured forth with meekness and resignation.

These observations naturally arise from the re-
proof

proof which our Lord gave to Peter, when, with well meant, but unhallowed zeal, he had attempted to withstand his enemies with the sword. Our Lord tells him that such exertions were both unlawful and unnecessary: they were unlawful, because they were quite contrary to the spirit of his religion; and unnecessary, because, if he judged it expedient, he could in one moment have legions of angels sent to rescue him from their hands. But as, for the exemplifying of his religion, he forbade his Disciples to fight; so, for the fulfilling of the Scriptures, he forbore to deliver himself, though he might have done it in a way that was both easy and legitimate.

We propose to shew you,

- I. How easily our Lord could have rescued himself from their hands—

God has been pleased on many occasions to effect his purposes by the ministration of angels—

[Angels have been employed by him sometimes for the destruction of men, and sometimes for their preservation: and in either case they have always proved mighty and irresistible.

By the sword of an angel God destroyed the Egyptian first-born both of man and beast^a. By an angel he smote seventy thousand of David's subjects, for the pride and creature-confidence which he manifested in numbering the people^b. By an angel he slew an hundred and eighty-five thousand of Sennacherib's army in one single night^c.

Nor have angels proved less mighty to save than to destroy. The Hebrew Youths were kept unhurt in the fiery furnace^d: Daniel was preserved in a den of hungry lions^e: the twelve Apostles were brought forth from a prison to which they had been committed^f: and Peter, when chained and guarded in an inner prison with all imaginable care and safety, was, on the very night previous to his intended execution, liberated from his dungeon, and restored to the
embraces

^a Numb. xx. 16. with Exod. xii. 23. Where the Lord who protected Israel is distinguished from "the destroyer" who smote the Egyptians.

^b 2 Sam. xxiv. 16.

^c Isai. xxxvii. 36.

^d Dan. iii. 28.

^e Dan. vi. 22.

^f Acts v. 19.

embraces of his praying friends^g. These things are effected by the ministration of angels "who excel in strength."]

Of these our blessed Lord might have had any number to deliver him—

[He had given abundant proof indeed that he could, if he pleased, deliver himself: for on former occasions he had repeatedly withdrawn himself from his enemies, when they thought they had him in their power^h; and but a few minutes before he had beaten them all to the ground by a wordⁱ, shewing thereby that he could as easily have struck them dead, after the manner in which the armed bands were smitten when they were sent to apprehend Elijah^k. But, if he had needed assistance, he could have had legions of angels for his support. He needed only to ask of his Father, and it would be done: above seventy thousand of those powerful beings^l would be with him in an instant: and if one single angel was sufficient to destroy 185,000 warriors in a single night, what could not such an host of them effect, if he chose to employ them in his service?]

If then to deliver himself would have been so easy, it will be proper to inquire,

II. Why he forbore to do so—

The Scriptures had spoken much respecting the Messiah—

[They contained not only many predictions relative to his death in general, but some which referred to the very circumstances in which he was now placed. It had been foretold, that he should be assaulted by a tumultuous mob, composed of Jews and Gentiles^m, rich and poorⁿ: that he should be betrayed into their hands by one of his own Disciples^o: that he should give himself up to them, when he had power to deliver himself from them^p: that, instead of resisting them in any respect, he should go like a lamb to the slaughter^q: and that his Disciples, offended at his apparent weakness, should forsake him^r.

Now if these Scriptures were not fulfilled, one essential circumstance would be wanting to prove his Divine Mission—

^g Acts xii. 8—10.

^h Luke iv. 29, 30. John viii. 59.

ⁱ John xviii. 6.

^k 2 Kings i. 10, 12.

^l Computing a legion at 6000 "twelve legions" would be 72,000.

^m Ps. ii. 1—3.

ⁿ Ps. xxii. 12, 16.

^o Ps. xli. 9. & lv. 12, 13. with John xiii. 18.

^p Isai. l. 5, 6.

^q Isai. liii. 7.

^r Zech. xiii. 7. with Matt. xxvi. 31.

sion——— Moreover, if he should persist in withstanding the malice of his enemies, the eternal purposes of his Father would be frustrated; the very ends for which he had become incarnate would be defeated; and the whole world would be left to perish, notwithstanding all he had both done and suffered for their salvation——— But these were evils greater in our Lord's estimation than ten thousand deaths; and therefore he would not for one moment delay the accomplishment of these Scriptures, when once the proper season for it had arrived.]

On this subject we may ground some profitable

OBSERVATIONS,

1. We can be in no trouble, from whence the voice of prayer cannot extricate us—

[Prayer, if it accord with the will* and purpose of Jehovah, shall prevail as much for us as ever it prevailed for any of the saints of old. However imminent our danger be, or however desperate our condition, the pursuing foe shall be diverted from his purpose*, or the voracious whale be forced to disgorge his prey upon the dry land†. Prayer should, if necessary, bring all the angels in heaven to our support. Prayer is, in a sense, omnipotent; for it interests the almighty God in our behalf. O let us have worthy thoughts of the power and efficacy of prayer! And if Satan tempt us at any time to give up the contest, let us reprove him in the words of our Lord, "Thinkest thou, that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he will send me more than twelve legions of angels" to defeat thy malice?]

2. We should be contented to go to heaven in the way that God has marked out for us—

[Our frail nature is fond of ease. But soldiers are called to endure hardships: and this is the path marked out for us; it is "through much tribulation that we are to enter into the kingdom of heaven." In this way our Lord himself walked: "though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by things which he suffered," and was at last "made perfect through sufferings." In these things he was our example, whose steps we are to follow". Who are we then that we should be exempt from trials? If we were to consider them as punishments, they are infinitely lighter than what we deserve: but if we consider them as a furnace to purify us from our dross, and as an honour conferred upon us to render us conformed to our Saviour's image, methinks we should not withdraw ourselves

* 1 Pet. ii. 19—23.

† Jonah ii. 10.

" 1 Pet. ii. 21.

from them, even if we had it in our power; but be incomparably more desirous of acquiring benefit to our souls than of enjoying any present ease in our bodies.]

3. Our Lord's solicitude about the fulfilment of the Scriptures in things relating to his sufferings, is a pledge to us that he will be no less anxious about their accomplishment in what relates to the salvation of his people—

[There are "exceeding great and precious promises" given to the people of God. Our Lord himself has assured us that "none shall ever pluck us out of his hand;" that "no weapon formed against us shall ever prosper;" and that "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly." Now these "Scriptures cannot be broken;" "nor can one jot or tittle of them fail." We have a security for the accomplishment of them, not only in the veracity of God, but also in the government which Christ exercises over the world at large, and his Church in particular. "All things both in heaven and in earth are committed unto him:" and all the hosts of heaven are at his disposal. Will not he then be jealous for his own honour? Will not he who shuddered so at the thought of the Scriptures failing of their accomplishment in his own case, be equally anxious for the fulfilment of them in ours? Let us then humbly commit ourselves to him, assured that, however our enemies may appear to triumph for a time, they shall all be vanquished at last; and that, "having suffered with Christ, we shall also be glorified together."]

DCCXVI.

CHRIST FORSAKEN BY HIS DISCIPLES.

Matt. xxvi. 56. *Then all the Disciples forsook him and fled.*

NEXT to the presence of God, there is nothing so comforting in affliction as the sympathy of friends. The kind offices of those we love afford us tenfold pleasure in those seasons when trouble has depressed our spirits. On the other hand, the unkindness of professed friends is a most painful aggravation of any sorrow which we may be called to endure. The accumulated losses of Job were sustained

sustained by him with a holy fortitude and resignation: but, when he found that he was forsaken by his dearest friends, and that they from whom he might have expected pity became his vehement accusers ^a, he could no longer suppress the painful feelings of his mind. It must also have been a bitter ingredient in our Saviour's cup, that in the hour of his extremity he was abandoned by his own Disciples, who were bound by every tie to follow him even unto death. We cannot even read the record in our text without a mixture of indignation and grief. It forces however upon our minds many profitable reflections, some of which will serve as the basis of our present discourse.

I. How weak is the resolution of fallen man!

[Man, as originally formed by God, was capable of carrying into execution whatever his judgment approved or his will decreed: but it is far otherwise with us in our present state. Any one who had heard the firmness with which the Disciples expressed their determination to cleave unto their Lord, and "to die with him rather than deny him," would have supposed it impossible that their resolution should be shaken. But behold, in the time of trial they forgot all their vows, and fled from him with precipitation and terror. The intrepid Peter, the beloved John, the bold and ambitious James ^b, are weak as the rest of their brethren.

The resolutions which we also form on particular occasions appear immoveable. How earnest are many, when lying on a bed of sickness, to redeem their time; and how determined, if ever they should recover, to devote the remainder of their lives to God!—— Yet they are no sooner restored to health than they go back to their former habits and companions, and leave to a distant period the performance of their vows—— It is thus also with many after an awakening discourse: they see how vain it is to render unto God a mere formal or hypocritical service; and they resolve that henceforth they will offer him an undivided heart—— But their hearts are not stedfast in the covenant which they make; and their lives are little else than a series of reformations and declensions without any solid improvement in the Divine life——]

II. What

^a Job xix. 13, 14.

^b Mark x. 38, 39.

II. What great evils are even good men capable of committing!

[That the Disciples were good men is certain; for our Lord himself had recently testified, that "they were clean through the word which he had spoken to them." But their conduct on this occasion was most base and shameful. What *ingratitude* were they guilty of in forsaking their Lord, when their presence might perhaps be of most essential service to him! Jesus had conferred innumerable benefits on them: and it was for them that he had exposed himself to these cruel persecutions. Yet how do they requite his kindness? They have a peculiar opportunity to render him most essential service. From their long and constant attendance on him, they above all were qualified to answer any accusations which might be brought against him; and by their united testimony might perhaps prevail against the clamours of his enemies: but they, occupied only about their own safety, refuse him the important aid which they were able to afford, and leave him unprotected in the hands of his blood-thirsty enemies.

The *unbelief* also which they manifested on this occasion was highly criminal. They had been repeatedly told by Jesus that, after his death and resurrection, he would meet them in Galilee. *This* was equal to a promise on his part that they should be preserved. Moreover, at the very time when he was apprehended, he said in their hearing, "If ye seek me, let these go their way." *This* ought to have been regarded by them as a certain pledge of their security. But so completely were they overcome by fear, that they could not think of safety but in flight.

We mention not these things to make any man think lightly of sin. Sin is a dreadful evil, in whomsoever it is found; but most of all in those who profess godliness. And we notice it in the Disciples, only that we may put all persons on their guard against it——— and to make them sensible to whom they are indebted for the measure of steadfastness they have hitherto been enabled to maintain———]

III. How desirable is it to have just views of Jesus Christ!

[Our blessed Lord forewarned his Disciples that their desertion of him would originate in their misconception of his character and office: "All ye shall be offended in me this night." They had seen their Divine Master controlling the very elements themselves: from whence they had concluded him to be the true Messiah. But, now they behold him

him bound, and led away by an armed band, they begin to think that all their former notions were false, and that the expectations which they had founded on his numerous miracles were delusive. Jesus seemed to them now to be like Sampson after his locks were cut: he was become weak as other men. Hence they could no longer repose any confidence in him, but fled like sheep without a shepherd.

And is it not thus with the ungodly? Wherefore do they despise Jesus, but because they know neither his power nor his grace?—— Must we not trace to the same source also the desponding fears of the contrite? Surely, if they knew how able and willing Jesus is to save them to the uttermost, they would commit their souls to him without doubt or fear—— We may add also, respecting the godly themselves, that if they had brighter discoveries of his glory and excellency, they would be more ardent in their love to him, and more diligent in his service—— We may say of all, as of those who crucified our Lord, that “had they known him (more thoroughly), they would not have acted thus and thus towards him.”]

From these reflections we shall be naturally led to SUGGEST a word of,

1. Warning—

[Some take up a profession of religion hastily, because they do not expect persecution, and others because they do not fear it. But it becomes us to guard against inadvertence on the one hand and self-confidence on the other. Let not any imagine that it is an easy thing to be a Christian; or that they can follow Christ aright without having a cross to bear. We must all, in some measure at least, “drink of the cup that our Divine Master drank of; and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with:” and therefore we should “prepare our hearts for temptation.” *To every one, therefore, that desires to be a Christian*, we would say; “COUNT THE COST;” “lest after having begun to build, you be not able to finish.” *To those who are bold and confident in their profession*, our warning must bear a different aspect: “BE NOT HIGH-MINDED, BUT FEAR.” Surely, when we behold all the Disciples, after such vehement protestations of fidelity, forsaking their Lord in his utmost extremity, we have reason enough to be “jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy.” While we “think we are standing firm, we should take heed lest we fall.” We should maintain in our minds a constant sense of our proneness to sin; and cry daily and hourly to God, “Hold up my going in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.”]

2. Encourage-

2. Encouragement—

[The failure of such persons as our Lord's Disciples might well cause us to despond, if we had not a firmer foundation to build upon than any resolution of our own. But we have the word and oath of Jehovah for our support: he has said, "I will never leave thee, never, never forsake thee." This promise was fulfilled to our blessed Saviour, when he was deserted by all his friends^c. It was accomplished also on behalf of the apostle Paul, when he was in circumstances nearly similar^d. And we also are warranted to expect the same Divine aid and consolation, whenever our necessities peculiarly require it^e. Let us then, whilst we are weak in ourselves, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Only let our trust be in HIM; and then we need "not fear, though an host should encamp against us," or though earth and hell should conspire to destroy us. "The grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us," "nor shall any thing prevail to separate us from his love."]

^c John xvi. 32.^d 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.^e Isai. xliii. 2.

DCCXVII.

OUR LORD'S CONDEMNATION BY THE JEWISH COUNCIL.

Matt. xxvi. 63—66. *And the High Priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God? Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the High Priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard of his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.*

THE ungodly in their pursuits often manifest a diligence which may put to shame the lukewarmness of God's most zealous servants. Nor is it only in the gratification of their lusts that they display this ardour, but in their opposition to what is good. They feel themselves reproved by the blameless conversation of others, and would there-

fore gladly bring down all to their own level. Striking is that declaration of Solomon; "They sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall^a." We have an awful illustration of this in the conduct of the Jewish Governors towards our blessed Lord at all times, but especially at the close of his life. The High Priest and scribes and elders had been occupied in examining witnesses against our Lord till midnight: yet, apprehensive that they had not gained such information as would warrant them to condemn him, they assembled, even the whole Sanhedrim, *as soon as it was day*^b, in the palace of the High Priest; and prosecuted their inquiries with redoubled earnestness, in order that they might effect his destruction without delay. The particular circumstances here recorded shall be noticed by us,

I. In a way of easy illustration—

In this trial of our Lord there are three things that require our attention;

1. His examination—

[His enemies had endeavoured to substantiate something against him by means of witnesses, but were defeated by the discordance of their testimony. The High Priest, therefore, had recourse to a method which his office authorized^c, and from which he had little doubt of success; he adjured his prisoner, in the name of the living God, to declare the truth upon oath, and either to avow openly, or plainly to disavow, his pretensions to the office of their Messiah. Now if this had been donè in a spirit of candour, and with a sincere desire of ascertaining the truth, we think he would have been fully justified in resorting to the measure: for the question was of infinite importance to the whole nation, inasmuch as their everlasting salvation depended on their receiving him if he were indeed the Messiah, and rejecting him if he were an impostor. The honour of God also was deeply implicated in it; and therefore it was right that he should exert his judicial authority to have the matter, which had so long agitated the nation, brought to a decision. But there was in the mind of the judge

a pre-

^a Prov. iv. 16.

^b Luke xxii. 66.

^c Numb. v. 19—21.

a predetermination to condemn him: and the adjuration had no other object than that of gaining from the mouth of our Lord himself a plea for effecting his destruction. And it is precisely thus that the inquiries of many about religion are made, not so much with a view to useful information, as for the finding occasion against the Gospel, and against those who profess it.]

2. His confession—

[Whilst the people clamorously brought all kinds of accusations against him, our Lord held his peace; but when the High Priest adjured him in the name of the living God, he could no longer keep silence; but plainly and unequivocally said, "I am" the Christ; "I am" the Son of God^d. But, to cut off occasion from those who sought occasion against him, he brought to their remembrance a portion of Holy Writ, with which they were well acquainted, and which they were expecting about that time to be fulfilled^e. It was universally known that Daniel spake of the Messiah; and that "the Son of Man" should establish an universal kingdom: and our Lord warns his enemies, that however they might despise him on account of the meanness of his present appearance, they should one day "see him coming in the clouds of heaven," not only to punish Jerusalem, but to judge the world. This should have put them on their guard at least, and prevented that precipitate judgment which they were about to form: but the Scripture has no weight with men who are filled with prejudice; or rather, an appeal to it does but irritate them the more, and render them willing, though unconscious, instruments of fulfilling its predictions.]

3. His sentence—

[No sooner was this confession uttered, than the High Priest, to testify his abhorrence of what he called blasphemy, rent his clothes. This, though a common way of expressing grief or indignation among the Jews, was forbidden to the High Priest, whose august character was supposed to render him superior to all such transports of passion^f. But, on this occasion, he who should have inclined to mercy was the first to condemn the prisoner, and to stir up the whole court against him. Little consideration is wanted, when religion is to be opposed: clamour will easily supply the want of argument, and prejudice supersede the necessity of proof: hence his assessors in judgment instantly adopted his sentiments; and all condemned Jesus, as a blasphemer,

to

^d See Mark xiv. 62.

^e Dan. vii. 13, 14.

^f Compare 2 Kin. xviii. 37. & xix. 1. with Lev. xxi. 10.

to suffer death. How awful to behold a number of persons, possessed both of the magisterial and sacerdotal office, branding as a blasphemer God's only begotten Son, and, with malice truly diabolical, exclaiming, "He is guilty of death!" What must the heavenly hosts have felt, if they were spectators of this transaction! and how ought *we* to feel, when we consider, that we bear about with us the same evil dispositions, and, unless restrained by grace, should be as ready as they to renew the same scenes. We may imagine indeed, that the peculiarity of their situation led them to wickedness which we are incapable of committing: but it is a certain truth, that we in like circumstances should act as they did, if God did not interpose to enlighten and restrain our minds. The haste and acrimony with which godly persons are calumniated amongst us, shew clearly that we are actuated by the same principles as the Jews were, and, as far as occasion is afforded, are ready to tread in their steps.]

Let us next advert to the history,

II. In a way of spiritual improvement—

In this view much instruction may be gathered from it. We may learn from it,

1. To inquire after Christ—

[With what earnestness did the High Priest and Elders pursue their inquiries; depriving themselves even of their rest, in order to acquire the information they desired! And are not *we* equally interested in the inquiry, "Whether he be the Christ, the Son of God?" Should we be content to take this matter upon trust, and not inquire into the grounds on which it stands, and the evidences which are adduced in its support? Or, having ascertained the truth of his Messiahship, should we not examine into the nature of his work, and office, and character? In our spirit, indeed, we cannot too widely differ from the Jews; but in our zeal and diligence we may well propose them to ourselves as objects of imitation. For what is there in the whole world that deserves our attention in comparison of this? St. Paul "accounted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." Nor let us imagine that the study of the holy Scriptures is to be confined to Ministers; it is a work equally necessary for all, though all cannot devote the same portion of their time to it. And it is a work to which all are competent, as far as is necessary for their spiritual instruction. To all then would I say, "Search the Scriptures; for in them
ye

ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Christ.”]

2. To trust in him—

[When we see our Lord sentenced to death without any fault whatever having been found in him, then we see what is to be our plea at the bar of judgment. This very circumstance of his having been condemned without cause frees us from condemnation. Having no sins of his own, his death was an expiation for our sin; and shall become effectual for the salvation of all who trust in him. To this agree the words of St. Peter: “Christ once suffered for sins, *the just for the unjust*, that he might bring us to God.” Hence, whilst we confess ourselves to have deserved the deepest condemnation, we may point to him as our Surety and Substitute; and may say with the Prophet, “He was wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities; the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him, and by his stripes *we* are healed.” O that we may never lose sight of this blessed truth, which is the hope of all the ends of the earth! Let us contemplate it; let us glory in it; let it be the one labour of our souls to “live by faith in him, and to say continually, He hath loved ME, and given himself for ME.”]

3. To confess him openly—

[Our Lord well knew what would be the consequence of the confession that he made; yet would he not conceal the truth: and shall we be afraid to confess HIM? When he was not deterred by the most cruel death, shall we be intimidated by a reproachful name? Shall we not rather glory in being counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake? Yes: let us take up our cross cheerfully, and “follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” If persecution should menace us with its severest penalties, let us be ready to answer with the holy Apostle, “None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may but finish my course with joy,” and fulfil my duty to my Lord. Let us remember, that as *he* “endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” so shall we also, “having overcome, be seated with him on his throne, as he sitteth on his Father’s throne.”]

4. Look forward to his second coming—

[Ere long he will surely come again, according to his word; and “every eye shall see him, and they also who

pierced

pierced him." But with what eyes will his enemies behold him then! How glad would they then be, if they could hide themselves from his presence under rocks and mountains! Not so his believing people: *they* will rejoice and welcome his arrival as the commencement and consummation of all their joys. Thus saith the Prophet: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed^h." And to the same effect, only in far more awful language, is the testimony of the apostle Paulⁱ: "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest," &c. &c. Look forward then, I say, to that day; remembering, that tribulation is the way to the kingdom, and that "all who have been partakers of his sufferings now, shall, when his glory shall be revealed, be glad before him with exceeding joy^k." "Having suffered with him, ye shall also be eternally glorified together^l."]

^h Isai. lxvi. 5.ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 6—10.^k 1 Pet. iv. 13.^l Rom. viii. 17. 2 Tim. ii. 12.

DCCXVIII.

THE INDIGNITIES OFFERED TO CHRIST IN THE PALACE OF THE HIGH PRIEST.

Matt. xxvi. 67, 68. *Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ; Who is he that smote thee?*

THE sufferings of our blessed Lord were not confined to the garden or the cross; but were continued through all the intervening period without intermission. Those which he experienced immediately after his condemnation by the Sanhedrim, may be considered in a twofold view;

I. As inflicted on him.

We cannot read the account given us by the different Evangelists, without being filled with utter astonishment at,

1. The

1. The impiety of his persecutors—

[In every civilized state condemned criminals are held as objects of compassion: when once the law is put in force against them, they are treated at least with outward decorum and respect; and every one would wish rather to alleviate than to aggravate their sorrows. But in the servants of the High Priest, if not in some of the council also, we behold the most savage barbarity, and the most *wanton cruelty*. To spit in the face of a person was the greatest indignity that could be offered him: and to pluck off his beard by force, must needs be attended with excruciating pain. Yet in this way, together with blows, did they insult and torment the victim of their malice.

To this cruelty they added the most *horrid blasphemy*. Our Lord was known to have professed himself the Christ; and to have shewn himself “a Prophet, mighty in words and deeds.” But they made the very offices which he sustained for our salvation a subject of profane derision: they blindfolded him, and then smote him with canes, and with the palms of their hands, saying unto him, “Prophecy unto us, thou Christ; Who is he that smote thee?” They had accused him of blasphemy: but another Evangelist justly retorts the charge; and says, in reference to their present conduct, “Many other things blasphemously spake they against him.”

Who would have conceived that human nature should be capable of such atrocities?]

2. The meekness and gentleness of Christ—

[We are told in the foregoing verses, that “Jesus held his peace” amidst all the accusations of his enemies. The same conduct he observed under the aggravated trials that he now endured. Not an angry or vindictive word escaped his lips. How justly might he have vindicated his Divine character, by striking dead upon the spot the persons who so wantonly abused him! He might at least have dwelt more largely on the hint which he had suggested, when adjured by the High Priest to declare his real character^a; and might have told them how he would resent and punish their impieties when they should stand before his tribunal. It might indeed be supposed that he uttered many things which are not recorded in this brief history; but, whatever he might say or do on other occasions, we are sure that, during the whole scene of his last sufferings, “when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened

^a ver. 64.

threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”]

But these indignities are to be considered in another view, namely,

II. As bearing testimony to him—

The general agreement between our Lord's character and the prophecies concerning him, is a convincing evidence of his Messiahship—

[The circumstances which were foretold respecting him were so numerous, so minute, so improbable, and so contradictory, (if we may so speak,) that no one could have ventured to predict such things respecting an impostor; nor could they have been fulfilled in him by chance. None but God, who ordereth all things according to the counsel of his own will, could have foreseen them, or have secured their accomplishment: and therefore the things, so foreseen, and so accomplished, infallibly testify, that the person in whom they were accomplished was indeed the Christ——]

In these sufferings more especially we see a confirmation of all his pretensions and professions—

[His trials, and his behaviour under them, were both subjects of prophecy. Let Micah tell us how the Messiah was to be treated: “They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek^b.” Let Isaiah describe his conduct under that and various other indignities: “He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; he hid not his face from shame and spitting.” With these lights let me go and search for the Messiah. Where shall I find him? I go into the High Priest's palace: I descend into the hall among the servants; there I see the indignities offered to the despised Nazarene: I behold him smitten on the face with sticks, as well as with the palms of their hands^d; I see the inhuman wretches spitting in his face; whilst he endures all his sufferings with invincible patience. There, therefore, I recognize the Messiah, the Saviour of the world; and falling down before him, I exclaim with Thomas, “My Lord, and my God.”]

In this history we behold, as in a glass,

1. How Christ is yet treated by an ungodly world—

[It

^b Mic. v. 1.

^c Isai. l. 6. See also our Lord's own prophecy, Luke xviii. 32.

^d Beza justly translates *ἑπάρμισαν* *bucillis ceciderunt*. And this marks the accomplishment of Micah's prophecy.

[It is not any longer in the power of any to offer him the same personal insults that are recorded in the text: but as they who live in sin are said to "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame," so may they with equal justice be said to "spit in his face and buffet him:" and, while they imagine that he neither regards nor notices their impieties, they do in fact repeat the blasphemies of those who smote him, and say, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ; Who is he that smote thee?" Let then the indignation which we feel against that blasphemous and inhuman rabble, be turned against ourselves: for, as often as we have violated his laws, and encouraged ourselves with hopes of impunity in sin, we have renewed the transactions of that awful day: and we have even more need to humble ourselves than they, inasmuch as we have professed to acknowledge him as our Saviour, whereas they really thought him an impostor, who deserved all that they inflicted on him.]

2. How his disciples must expect to be treated—

["The servant must not expect to be above his Lord: if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." Indeed, as in the case before us, the very name by which God himself has designated them is used against them in a way of profane derision, and made a term of the most malignant reproach. We appeal to all, whether the children of God are not continually called in Scripture "the elect:" yet is there not in the whole language one single term that is so offensive to the world at large, or that is used with more bitter sarcasm than this. Yes; this is regarded precisely as the terms "Christ and Prophet" were by those persecutors of our Lord: and the same idea of presumption and hypocrisy is now attached to those who claim the former title, as was annexed to the pretensions of our blessed Lord to the office and character of the Messiah. But as then the contempt poured on Jesus confirmed that very truth which it was designed to invalidate, so the reproaches cast on God's elect at this day, is an evidence in their favour: our Lord himself declared that "it should turn unto us for a testimony." Let us not then think it strange if we are called to endure fiery trials; but let us expect to be conformed to our blessed Saviour as well in sufferings as in glory.]

3. How we are to conduct ourselves under such treatment—

[We should “arm ourselves with the same mind” that was in Christ Jesus. We should “possess our souls in patience,” and “let patience have its perfect work.” “Being reviled, we should bless; being defamed, we should intreat; being persecuted, we should suffer it.” We should not either in word or deed avenge ourselves, but “give our cheek to the smiters” like him^f, and commit ourselves to him who judgeth righteously; who will in due time “re-compense tribulation to them who trouble us, and to us who are troubled, rest.”]

^f Lam. iii. 30.

DCCXIX.

IMPENITENCE.

Matt. xxvii. 3.—5. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

AS Jesus was by his own death to take away the sins of others, it was necessary, not only that he should have no sin himself^a, but that his innocence should be made to appear by every species of evidence that could be adduced to confirm it. Accordingly, it pleased God so to overrule events that the witnesses brought against him should not agree in their testimony; that the very judge who was to condemn him should repeatedly pronounce him guiltless; and that even the wretch who betrayed him should, with very peculiar solemnity, attest his innocence.

We might from this circumstance proceed to prove the Messiahship of Jesus, and the consequent truth of the religion which he has established. But it is our intention to enter more deeply into the passage before us; and to consider, not merely the general result of Judas' confession, but the various characters delineated in the words before us.

And here we have a very striking picture of,

I. The

^a John iii. 5.

I. The thoughtless sinner—

[Judas, it should seem, never thought that his Master would suffer himself to be apprehended and put to death. He had often seen Jesus escaping in a miraculous manner out of the hands of his enemies^b, and confounding the people who came to apprehend him, so that they could not prosecute their purpose^c: and therefore he expected that he would act in a somewhat similar manner on this occasion. It was in the hope of this that he was prevailed upon to sell and betray his Lord. Had he foreseen all the consequences that followed, it is probable he would not, at least for so small a sum, have subjected his Master to such miseries, and himself to such infamy and ruin.

And is it not thus with sinners in general? Do they not all proceed to gratify their own inclinations under the idea that no great evil shall arise from it, either to themselves or others? Had David the remotest thought that his numbering of the people would issue in the destruction of seventy thousand of his subjects? Or did he, when sending for Bathsheba, foresee the murder of Uriah, together with about forty others; or the hardening of so many thousands, in that and every age, against the ways of God?

Let us come still nearer home: does the seducer consider what he is likely to bring upon the person whom he tempts from the path of virtue? Does he contemplate her shame and sorrow, or the inconsolable anguish of her parents; or the temporal and eternal ruin which she herself will bring on others? Does he contemplate her infamous life, her lothesome death, her endless misery? Ah! were he to have one glimpse of all the consequences of his conduct, we can scarcely conceive any man so abandoned as to purchase a momentary gratification at so high a price. Does he also consider the consequences as they respect himself? Alas! he thinks of nothing but the indulgence of his lusts: he considers the bait without advert- ing to the hook: he promises himself that nothing very calamitous shall result from his conduct: he trusts that through the mercy of God it shall pass unnoticed; or that he shall, by repentance, make compensation for it; or that he shall, by some other means, enjoy the pleasures of sin, without experiencing its bitter consequences. With these vain hopes he goes forward, till he finds, too late, that the evils which he would not anticipate, he is not able to controul.]

II. The

^b Luke iv. 30. John viii. 59.^c John vii. 45, 46.

II. The awakened sinner—

[Thoughtless as is the career of the wicked, they cannot always ward off conviction. Even Judas at last “repented himself.” What a different aspect had sin when his eyes were opened, from what it had when he was blinded by his covetousness! The wages of iniquity, which, at first promised him so much happiness, were now a burthen to him, insomuch that he tendered them to the Chief Priests again, and, when they refused his offer, cast them down in the Temple with indignation and abhorrence. He proceeded further: he confessed and aggravated his sin; and strove to undo the evil he had committed; yea, and indirectly testified against the wickedness of the priests, who had conspired to shed, and tempted him to betray, the innocent blood of Jesus.

All this indeed proceeded only from a selfish terror, and from a vain hope of pacifying his conscience by these means. In the midst of all, there was no real contrition, any more than in Saul^d or Pharaoh^e: there was no prayer to God; no faith in Christ. Though, therefore, he was awakened and terrified, he was far from being truly converted to God.

In him we may see the picture of thousands, both in ancient and modern times. Many will make restitution of their ill-gotten gain: many under a sense of guilt will confess some heinous crime; especially when the consequences of it far exceed their expectations. We do not wish indeed to depreciate the value of such changes: but it is incumbent on us to declare that they are far from constituting true repentance. They argue an awakened, but not a converted mind. There must be, in addition to all this, a deep humiliation, a lively faith, and an earnest crying unto God for mercy. And if, like Judas, we do not hate sin, but only its consequences; if we confess to man only, and not to God; if we labour to expiate our guilt by restitution or reformation, instead of fleeing for refuge to the blood of atonement; we shall, like him, have no solid benefit from our repentance: our very sorrows will be only an earnest of hell itself.]

III. The hardened sinner—

[While some are awakened to a sense of their guilt, others proceed in the commission of the most horrible iniquities without remorse or concern. The conduct of Judas in criminating himself before those at whose instigation he had betrayed his Lord, should certainly have

^d 1 Sam. xxvi. 21.

^e Exod. ix. 27.

operated

operated to suspend their proceedings, and to bring them to repentance. But they were bent on the accomplishment of their blood-thirsty purposes, and were alike deaf to the confessions of their agent and to the voice of their own conscience.

But shall we say that this was a singular case? Would to God that similar instances did not perpetually occur! Return to the case of the seducer. See him, when the unhappy victim of his wiles comes to him under the most insupportable agonies of mind, and calls on him for comfort and support: what answer so common as that given in the text? The obdurate wretch, forgetful of all the obligations of honour and conscience, replies in answer to all her complaints, "What is that to me? look thou to that." Thus it is also with those who tempt the inconsiderate youth to extravagance; and, having caught him in their net, demand their debts with unfeeling menaces and inexorable rigour. Perhaps in none is such conduct more manifest than in the gamester, who, having gained the property of his companion, discards all thought of his personal and domestic troubles, and, rejoicing over the spoils which he has gotten, says in his heart, "What is that to me? see thou to that."

Numberless other instances might be adduced to shew, how sin hardens the heart against the *temporal* distresses of those whom we ourselves have beguiled. And how are we affected by their *spiritual* trouble? Here, for the most part, our indifference rises to contempt: and, instead of being led by the penitence of our companions to follow their good example, we load them with opprobrious names, alike regardless of their sorrows and of our own safety.]

IV. The despairing sinner—

[There is a "repentance unto salvation;" but there is also a repentance which leaves room for everlasting penitence, "a repentance to be repented of." Such was the remorse which Judas felt on this occasion. It carried him far, (would to God that all were even as much affected with their sins as he!) but still he stopped short of true repentance. Having no faith in Jesus^f, he abandoned himself to despair; and, to terminate the present agonies of his mind, he put a period to his existence.

Such despair is not uncommon: nor is it uncommon to behold it issuing in suicide. Indeed, it is a very principal device of Satan to urge men to this fatal act, because it most effectually secures his object, the destruction of their souls.

^f John vi. 64, 70, 71.

souls. He first hides from them the consequences of transgression; then represents to them their guilt as unpardonable; and then suggests, that death will put a period to their sorrows. This temptation is most strongly felt by those who have sinned against light and knowledge. "Putting away a good conscience, they are left to make shipwreck of their faith." And it seems a just and righteous retribution, that they who so ungratefully reject the counsel of God should ultimately "perish in their own corruptions."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us not condemn religion for the faults of those who profess it—

[How absurd would it be to bring the treachery of Judas as an argument against the truth of Christianity! Does Christianity encourage treason? Did even the traitor himself approve of his own conduct? If all the twelve Disciples had been traitors, it would not have altered the nature of true religion: *that* is unalterably pure and holy: and where its operation is effectual, it transforms men into the image of their God.]

2. Let us guard against the love of the world—

[This was the root of Judas's apostacy. He loved money, and "was a thief from the beginning;" and at last, from indulging in petty thefts, he was prevailed upon for gain to betray his Lord. Thousands of others also are, from the very same principle, yet daily erring from the faith, and piercing themselves through with many sorrows*. Let us then beware, lest this "root of bitterness springing up, trouble, and defile, and destroy our souls." We shall find at last, that to gain the whole world, and lose our own souls, is an unprofitable bargain.]

3. Let us carefully improve the means of grace—

[The traitor enjoyed every privilege which man could possess: he had even been warned by Jesus respecting the very crime he was going to commit. Happy had it been for him if he had improved the warning! He would then have shunned the fatal act which precipitated him "to his own place." Happy also would it be for us, if we made a suitable improvement of the warnings and instructions given to us! We should then avoid every species
of

of iniquity, and our feet would be guided into the way of peace.]

DCCXX.

THE DISPOSAL OF THE MONEY PAID TO THE TRAITOR JUDAS.

Matt. xxvii. 9, 10. *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the Prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*

THE more we consider the number, and minuteness of the prophecies, the more we must be convinced that Jesus was the person whom God had fore-ordained to be the Saviour of the world. One can scarcely imagine it possible, that an uninspired person should venture to predict such remarkable circumstances, as the precise sum that should be paid for the Saviour's blood, and the ultimate disposal of that money in the purchase of a potter's field; or that such predictions should be fulfilled by chance. St. Matthew was more careful than any of the other Evangelists in adducing these proofs of Christ's Messiahship. But the passage cited by him as from Jeremiah, is to be found only in the prophecies of Zechariah. To account for this, many ingenious conjectures have been offered by learned men: but the most probable of them seems to be, either that the name, being abbreviated, was mistaken by some early transcriber, and from thence copied by others^a; or that, no name being mentioned by the Evangelist, an early transcriber inserted erroneously the name of Jeremiah in the margin, from whence it was afterwards incorporated with the text^b. Whatever way we

^a This might easily be, as the mistake would be only of one letter, *Ipe* for *Zpe*. In some copies the name is so abbreviated.

^b Some Versions insert no name at all, but read the passage thus; "Spoken by the Prophet."

we take of solving the difficulty, the fact remains the same, that the peculiar circumstances in the text were foretold many hundred years before their accomplishment.

The words of the Prophet, according to their literal import, record a transaction that took place between the Prophet and the Jews. The Prophet, as God's agent and representative among them, demanded, What value they set upon his labours? They, despising both him and the Deity from whom he had received his commission, weighed for his price thirty pieces of silver: upon which, God, indignant at such an insult, ordered him to cast them away to a poor potter, who was at that time working in the Temple^c. Under this figure God intended to foreshew how the Jews would undervalue the great Prophet whom he should send among them; and how the thirty pieces of silver, which they would pay as "the price of his blood," should be disposed of.

That we may give a practical turn to our subject, we shall deduce from the different parts of it some important OBSERVATIONS:

I. For how small a price do men sacrifice their interest in the Saviour!

[God himself exclaims with astonishment, "A goodly price that I was prized at of them!"^d Thirty pieces of silver was the price of a slave^e: and yet that was (in the estimation of the Jews) the value of Jehovah's mercies, and (in the eyes of Judas and the Jewish rulers) of the Redeemer's blood. But *we*, it may be said, know how to form a different estimate of these things. Would to God we did! But there is no gain so small, no pleasure so transient, but we choose it in preference to Christ, and are willing to part with Christ rather than forego the gratification we desire. Let sinners of every description attest (for indeed, however reluctantly, they must attest) this melancholy truth — — —]

II. How worthless will those things, for which we sold the Saviour, appear to us, as soon as conscience begins to perform its office!

[Judas

^c See Zech. xi. 12, 13.

^d ib.

^e Exod. xxi. 32.

[Judas had pleased himself with the thought of enjoying his ill-gotten wealth: but scarcely had he obtained it, before he was far more ready to part with it than ever he had been to procure it. Sin of every kind appears very different after we have committed it, from what it did under the immediate influence of temptation. While solicited by our own corrupt affections, we imagine that the particular object of our desire (whatever it may be) will conduce greatly to our happiness: but when we have swallowed the bait, then we begin to feel the hook; and oftentimes would gladly restore, if it were possible, all the pleasure we have felt, provided we could at the same time get rid of the sting that it has left behind. And what will be our views of sin, when once we come into the eternal world? How gladly would we then restore the thirty pieces of silver for which we have sold the Lord! Or, if through penitence and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we have obtained mercy, with what indignation should we receive a proposal to forego an interest in the Saviour for some momentary pleasure, or some trifling gain! — — — Ten thousand worlds would then appear to us as of no value in comparison of that inestimable pearl.]

III. Of how little avail will it be at the last day, to have rendered unto God a partial and hypocritical obedience!

[We blame not the Priests for refusing to put into the treasury the money which Judas cast down in the Temple: for if the price of a dog, or the hire of an harlot, were not to be presented to God, much less ought money that had been the reward of treachery, and “the price of blood.” But we marvel at their hypocrisy, in that they could suborn false witness, and persecute unto death an innocent man, and yet profess the smallest reverence for God. Truly, while “they strained at a gnat, they swallowed a camel.” They hoped perhaps to compensate for their oppression of Jesus by their gratuitous kindness to strangers. Yet, if we know ourselves, we shall not greatly wonder: for we may find a transcript of this very thing in our own hearts. How many are there eminent for truth and honesty, who yet are habitually regardless of all the sublimer exercises of religion! With respect to the second table of the Law, they are exemplary; but in their duties to God, they are altogether remiss. In the same manner, there are some who profess a great regard for the Gospel, who yet are defective in their adherence even to truth and honesty. Indeed there

‘ The field having been exhausted by the pottery, and rendered unfit for cultivation or pasture, was probably worth no more than what they gave for it, and applicable to no better purpose than that to which they destined it.

there are very few, who do not notoriously fail in some one particular: so "deceitful, and desperately wicked, is the heart of man." But it is certain that an observance of some duties will never procure us an exemption from others: "if we keep the whole law, and yet offend knowingly and habitually in any one point, we are guilty of all," and shall be dealt with as contemners of the Lawgiver himself. And as the name, "Aceldama," perpetuated the memory of the atrocious wickedness committed by the priests, so shall the very endeavours we use to conceal our impieties stamp them at last with indelible and eternal infamy.]

IV. How certainly shall every jot and tittle of God's word be accomplished!

[Little did the Chief Priests think of fulfilling the Scriptures: And little do the contemners of God and his Christ reflect, that they will one day be exhibited as proofs of God's veracity. But, as all the most contingent actions of men were infallibly foreseen, and not one single prediction, however improbable, ever failed of its accomplishment; so every promise and every threatening shall be fulfilled in its season, and the lot of men be fixed according to their true character. *In this world*, we see enough to assure us that God is true; but *in the world to come*, there shall be in all an irresistible demonstration of it: and every man, whether in heaven or in hell, shall be a living witness of his truth: the blessed shall inherit his promised mercies; the damned shall feel his threatened judgments. Let us consider then, that either our salvation or "damnation lingereth not;" and that "the things spoken concerning us have an end."]

* ver. 6—8. with Acts i. 18, 19.

DCCXXI.

PILATE'S PROTEST.

Matt. xxvii. 24, 25. *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

IT was appointed under the Law, that the beasts offered in sacrifice should be without blemish: and, for ascertaining their fitness to be offered, the strictest scrutiny was made. In the various examinations which

which our blessed Lord underwent, there was an exact accomplishment of this type: and the testimonies given by all who were concerned in his death, seem to have been providentially appointed for the manifesting of his fitness for the great work he had undertaken, even the work of saving a ruined world by the sacrifice of himself. His hour was now come that he should be delivered up to death: and Pilate, who had investigated every charge that was brought against him, and had already a great many times attested his innocence, now in the most solemn manner entered his protest against the procedure of his blood-thirsty enemies, and declared, that in putting him to death they would murder a just and inoffensive man; of which atrocious act they, and they only, should bear the guilt. In reply to this, they said, that if he would only leave them to execute their purpose, they were willing to take all responsibility from him, and all consequences on themselves; "His blood be on us, and on our children." Thus, even they, at the very time that they demanded his death, unwittingly acknowledged the truth of Pilate's assertions, and set their seal to this blessed truth, that Jesus was "cut off, not for his own sins," but for the sins of those whom he came to save.

Let us however take a nearer view of this subject; and distinctly consider,

I. Pilate's vain protest—

In some respects Pilate may be considered as having acted a bold and honest part; for

This protest of his was very solemn—

[It should seem that the washing of the hands in token of innocence, was a custom not unknown to the Romans; and, among the Jews, it was prescribed by God himself; when murder had been committed by some unknown person, and those who, from their proximity to the spot, might be supposed to have had some knowledge of the transaction, were called to clear themselves*. By this significant action did Pilate proclaim his determination not to imbrue his hands in innocent blood; accompanying it with a solemn testimony in favour of the person

accused,

* Deut. xxi. 6, 7.

accused, and an admonition to his enemies that they, and they only, must be answerable for his death.

[Thus far we approve, and applaud his protest.]

But it was vain—

[In some cases, such a protest would have really acquitted him in the sight both of God and man—

If the matter had been to be determined by a majority of voices, his conscience would have been clear. This was the case when Joseph, one of the Jewish Council, was out-voted in the Sanhedrim; and God himself acquits him of any participation in their guilt^b.

If the act had not been in itself sinful; and circumstances had occurred that rendered that necessary, which, under other circumstances, would have been inexpedient and improper; then his protest would have cleared him, even though he had done the act against which he protested: for this was the case of Paul, when he was compelled by the intrigues of false teachers to confirm his Apostolic authority by an appeal to visions, of which it would otherwise have been inexpedient for him to boast^c.

But Pilate was a Governor and a Judge, whose duty it was, no less to protect the innocent, than to punish the guilty. He had no right to sacrifice the life of an innocent person to the clamours of a mob. He should have told them plainly, that he would rather sacrifice his situation, and even life itself, than be guilty of such horrible injustice. And, however menacing the rising tumult might appear, he should have adhered to the path of duty, and risked all consequences. In not doing this, he neglected his office; and, by consenting to their wickedness, made himself a partaker of it. It was to no purpose to enter a protest against the act, and then join in the commission of it. His saying, "I am innocent," did not make him innocent: on the contrary, we are assured, on infallible authority, that in the sight of God he is considered as a confederate with the very people whom he thus professed to condemn^d.]

Nor less vain are many similar protests that are made amongst ourselves—

[What is more common than to reply, in justification of ourselves, 'I *must* do so?' One says, 'I *must* be guilty of such and such frauds: it is not my fault, but the fault of the trade: one cannot carry on trade without it.' Another, whilst he conforms to the sinful customs of the world, urges a similar excuse; 'I *must* do so, else I shall incur the odium of singularity, and endanger both my reputation and interest. I acknowledge

^b Luke xxiii. 51.

^c 2 Cor. xii. 1, 11.

^d Acts iv. 27.

acknowledge that the things are wrong; but I *must* do them.' Know then, that, if you *must* do them, you *must* also answer for them at the tribunal of God: and that, in that day, "not he who acquitteth himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord acquitteth^e."

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The people's rash engagement—

The guilt and punishment of murder were, among the Jews, expressed by "the blood of the murdered person being upon them^f." By this imprecation, therefore, the people meant to relieve Pilate's conscience, and to pacify his fears; engaging, that the crucifixion of Christ should never be considered as *his* act, but *theirs*; and that the consequences of it, if any, should come, not on *him*, but on *them* and *their children*. But,

What a rash engagement was this!

[What answer would it be to Cesar, if, being summoned to give an account of the injustice committed, and the dishonour brought thereby upon the whole Roman empire, Pilate should say, 'The people forced me to it?' Were not the people his subjects? and had he not the Roman soldiers at his command, to keep them in awe? To what purpose was he entrusted with this power, if he did not exercise it? Would this promise, of taking the responsibility on themselves, remove it from him? Assuredly not: On *him*, and not on *them*; would Cesar's displeasure fall.

But, supposing they could protect him from Cesar's anger, could they heal the wound which this act would inflict upon his conscience? Would this stern monitor be silent at their bidding? No: its remonstrances would be heard in spite of them; and to his dying hour would the voice of innocent blood cry out against him.

Thus, as it respected *him*, their engagement was vain and nugatory; but not so as it respected *themselves*: God held them to it; and made them feel the fearful responsibility attaching to it. But a few days elapsed, before they expressed their fears lest their imprecations should be answered^g: and before that generation passed away, the Divine judgments came upon them to the uttermost; insomuch that the Jewish Historian, who was himself a spectator of the fact, declares, that such multitudes of the captive Jews were crucified during the siege of Jerusalem, that 'there wanted room for the crosses

^e 2 Cor. x. 18.

^f Matt. xxiii. 35.

^g Acts v. 28.

crosses to stand upon, and wood to make them of.' *Then* was their request fulfilled: *then* was "the blood of Christ on them indeed, and on their children;" and, from that hour to the present moment, have they been "made an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations^b."]

And how much better are the engagements which many amongst us are ready to take upon themselves?

[When we endeavour to prevail on persons to act against the convictions of their conscience, we are ready to laugh at their scruples, and to ridicule their fears; and with great confidence to pledge our words, that their compliance with our advice will be attended with no bad consequence whatever. But, when we have prevailed over their credulity, can we fulfil our word? Can we in many cases avert even the temporal consequences of their conduct? How much less can we silence the clamours of their guilty conscience! — — — And least of all can we stand between God and their souls in the day of judgment — — —]

But though we cannot fulfil our engagements to *them*, we must, together with them, answer for our conduct to God; and perish under the accumulated guilt of ruining their souls. "Their blood will be required at our hands" — — —]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. To discard the fear of man—

[You see how true is that declaration, that "the fear of man bringeth a snareⁱ." Had Pilate in the first instance withstood, as he ought, the clamours of the people, he had never imbrued his hands in the Saviour's blood. He might have fallen a sacrifice to their rage, it is true; but he would have had reason to all eternity to rejoice that he had died in such a cause. And we would ask of you, What are your feelings *now* in reference to any sinful compliances you may have been drawn into, or any injuries you may have suffered in consequence of your non-compliance? Do you not even *now* see that it is better to regard God than man^k? Then "fear not man, who can only kill the body; but God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell: yea, I say unto you, fear Him^l" — — — Let the conduct of Levi be our pattern^m, and the command of Jesus our ruleⁿ.]

2. To maintain always a good conscience—

[God has given us a conscience, to be his Vicegerent in the soul. It may be said, that Paul sinned in following his conscience.

^b Jer. xxv. 9.

ⁱ Prov. xxix. 25.

^k Acts iv. 19.

^l Luke xii. 4, 5.

^m Deut. xxxiii. 9.

ⁿ Luke xiv. 26, 27.

conscience°. We answer, That he sinned, not in following his conscience, but in having such a misguided conscience. We should by a constant study of the Scriptures, and by fervent prayer for the teachings of God's Spirit, get our conscience enlightened and rectified. If we neglect to do this, we are answerable before God for all the errors we run into. But still we must follow the light we have. We must listen to the dictates of conscience at all times, and follow them without reserve. Every thing that it enjoins we must do^p, and nothing that it forbids^q. If it even suggest a doubt, we must not proceed till that doubt be removed^r. Nothing is more terrible than an accusing conscience^s; nothing more delightful than testimonies of its approbation^t. Labour therefore with all your might to acquire a good conscience, and "exercise yourselves night and day to maintain it^u."]

° Acts xxvi. 9.

p Jam. iv. 17.

q Rom. xiv. 22.

r Rom. xiv. 23.

s Matt. xxvii. 3, 4.

t 2 Cor. i. 12.

u Acts xxiv. 16.

DCCXXII.

THE MOCKING OF CHRIST UPON THE CROSS.

Matt. xxvii. 38—44. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the Chief Priests mocking him, with the Scribes and Elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

SOME, from idle curiosity, are fond of attending upon public executions; whilst others, from a commendable sensibility, could not prevail upon themselves to be present at such a scene. But there is no room for the one or other of these feelings, in the scene now presented to our view. Our corporeal senses can neither be gratified nor shocked: it is by faith only that we can realize the transactions of this day: but if we have faith, we shall "look on Him whom

whom we have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as for a first-born son." In general, the behaviour of the condemned person is the chief object of contemplation; that of the spectators is never so much as thought of: it is taken for granted, that *that* will be decorous, and suited to the solemn occasion. But, in the present instance, we wish particularly to notice the conduct of those who attended the crucifixion of our Lord: and we shall find that *their treatment of him is replete with instruction* in a variety of views:

I. As an exhibition of man's depravity—

[Much of the wickedness of man appears in the arrest, the prosecution, and the condemnation of our Lord: but in no part of his history do we behold such a mass of impiety as in that before us. For all that preceded his crucifixion, there was a reason: it was deemed necessary for the safety of the State that he should be put to death: and, till they had accomplished that object, we do not wonder at any thing they did to attain it. But, when they had attained it, and there was no further occasion for their hostilities, we are surprised beyond measure that there was no relaxation of their resentment. On all other occasions, the execution of criminals, however deservedly they suffer, calls forth a measure of compassion: but towards him the fury of all ranks of men raged with unabated force; and, like dogs, they seemed eager to devour the prey which they had already seized.

Had this ferocity been confined to the soldiers, we might have supposed that it arose from their education and habits. But "the Chief Priests, with the Scribes and Elders, and even the Rulers," all concurred in devouring the Lamb of God! They altogether forgot the demeanor which befitted their rank and office; yea, they lost sight of all the feelings of humanity; and encouraged by their example those atrocities, which policy, no less than humanity, should have led them to prevent. Even the malefactors caught the infernal flame; and, unmindful of their own agonies, or shame, or approaching dissolution, united in vilifying the Son of God; accounting themselves so much his superiors, that they might justly make him an object of derision and contempt.

Whatever had been a ground of accusation against him, they now made a subject of profane ridicule. Three years before, he had, in reference to his own body, said, "Destroy *this* Temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." This had been alleged against him, though not substantiated, as
an

an evidence of his hostility to the Temple : and now they cast it in his teeth, challenging him; if he were able, to do a much smaller thing, namely, to come down from the cross. His relation to God as his Son, and his power over Israel as their King, he was also called upon to prove, by descending from the cross : and even his affiance in God was deemed so absurd, that God himself was challenged by them to come to his assistance. All this too was attended with such outward expressions of triumph as corresponded with the malignant feelings of their hearts. But who would have conceived that even his most benevolent miracles should now be made a matter of reproach against him? Yet were even these brought forward, to give the keener edge to their blasphemies: "He saved others; himself he cannot save."

Now view this whole mass of savage cruelty, of base ingratitude, and of horrid impiety; view it as the offspring, not of one superlatively wicked individual, or of any particular class, but of a whole nation; and then you will be constrained to say, "Lord, what is man! Lord, what is man!"

The conduct of the Jews on this occasion is instructive also,]

II. As a trial of Christ's perfection—

[The sacrifices under the Law being required to be without spot or blemish, they were examined with the greatest care, that their fitness to be offered might be clearly ascertained. Now as Jesus was to be a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, it pleased God, that, previous to his being offered, he should undergo the strictest examination. Accordingly the severest scrutiny was instituted, and the result of every fresh examination was a stronger attestation of his innocence. But here we see him put into the hottest furnace, which must infallibly discover the alloy or dross, if any such were found in him. The most eminent of mankind had been subjected to far less trials, and had discovered that they were but men, weak, sinful, and corrupt. Moses had "spoken unadvisedly with his lips;" Job had "cursed the day of his nativity;" and Paul had "reviled the Ruler of God's people." But in Jesus there was not the smallest error or imperfection. Such was his *patience*, that "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." He complains indeed by the Prophet, "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness;" yet, as another Prophet testifies, "He was altogether like a lamb led to the slaughter, and, like a sheep before her shearers, dumb." Such was his *forbearance* too, that when he might justly have called fire from heaven to consume his enemies, as Elijah did, or caused the earth to open and swallow

swallow them up, as it did those who had rebelled against his servant Moses, he would not do it. Nor, on the other hand, would he, as well he might have done, accept their challenge, and prove his almighty power by descending from the cross. He knew that this would not convince them, even if he should do it: he intended also shortly to give them an infinitely stronger evidence of his Messiahship, (even that which he had so often promised them,) by rising from the dead: and he was determined that nothing should divert him from the work which he had undertaken to perform. He might well have said, "Seeing ye put me from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life," I relinquish my work, and leave you to the judgments which you have so richly merited^a. But he would not save himself, because he was bent on saving us; and "for the joy that was set before him," of delivering a ruined world, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame," till he could say, respecting the whole of his work, "It is finished."

Here then we have ample proof of his sinless character, and that he truly was, what it behoved him to be, "a Lamb without blemish and without spot."

There yet remains one other view in which their treatment of him is instructive; namely,]

III. As a proof of his Messiahship—

[The circumstance of his being crucified between two malefactors is declared by the Evangelist to have been an accomplishment of that prophecy, "He was numbered with the transgressors." But it was not only in what they *did*, that his enemies fulfilled the Scriptures; they fulfilled them equally in what they *said*; insomuch that, if they had been ever so desirous to conform to the Prophetic Writings, they could not possibly have fulfilled them more accurately or more minutely. David, personating the Messiah, tells us how his enemies "wagged their heads" at him; and then specified the very words which the Chief Priests and Elders used on this occasion^b. Now, if we consider how exactly this prophecy was fulfilled, and that there were a thousand years between the prophecy and its completion, we shall see that the most casual circumstances of our Lord's humiliation, no less than those which were more plainly determined, attest, beyond a doubt, the truth of his Messiahship.

Let it not be thought, that the notice of these things is a needless repetition. It is by an appeal to prophecy that the Apostles prove the Divine Mission of their Lord; and therefore, the more fully we mark the accomplishment of Scripture in him, the more abundantly shall we be confirmed in the faith of the Gospel.]

Let

^a Acts xiii. 46.

^b Ps. xxii. 6—8.

Let us then LEARN from hence,

1. To believe in his name—

[It is not a mere assent to the history of the Gospel that we mean to recommend, but a belief in Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Many consider his death as nothing more than a confirmation of his doctrine; but if he died only to confirm his doctrine, his descent from the cross would have been a stronger confirmation of it than his death. It was as an atoning sacrifice that he died; and therefore his death was indispensable for the completion of his Mediatorial work: and it is *in this view* that we call upon you to believe in him. Consider all this contempt and ignominy as endured for you, as “the chastisement of your peace,” and as the appointed means of rescuing you from “everlasting shame and contempt” — — —]

2. To follow his steps—

[Our Lord has taught us to expect the same treatment which he himself received. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose, that “if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household.” How then on such occasions should we behave? We answer, That he has purposely “set us an example, in order that we should follow his steps^c,” and that therefore, whatever we may be called to endure, we should “possess our souls in patience^d,” “not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing^e.” This is the express command of our adorable Saviour^f: and the nearer we can resemble him, the more will he be glorified in us. I know that we are apt to plead our weakness and irritability as an excuse for our impatience: but this is no excuse: it only shews how unlike we are to our blessed Lord, and how much we need both his mercy and grace. Paul was a man of like passions with us; and he tells us how he demeaned himself on such occasions; “being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat^g.” Let us remember then, that “the grace of Christ is equally sufficient for us;” that “through his strength we can do all things;” and that the greatest “ornament we can have on earth, is that of a meek and quiet spirit^h.”]

^c 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

^f Matt. v. 44.

^d Luke xxi. 19. Jam. i. 4.

^g 1 Cor. iv. 10—13.

^e 1 Pet. iii. 9.

^h 1 Pet. iii. 4.

DCCXXIII.

THE SUPERNATURAL DARKNESS.

Matt. xxvii. 45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

IT might well be expected that the crucifixion of the Son of God should be accompanied with circumstances of a peculiar nature; sufficient, when properly understood, to remove the offence of his cross, and to distinguish him from all others who should suffer the same kind of death. The whole creation is at God's command, and ready, in any manner that he sees fit, to display his power. The sun in particular has been made his instrument for that end. In the days of Joshua, it suspended its course for the space of a whole day^a. In the days of Hezekiah, it reversed its natural course, and went backwards ten degrees on the sun-dial of Ahaz^b. And now, at the death of Christ, when risen to its meridian height, it veiled its face in darkness^c. How far the darkness extended, whether over the whole earth, as some think, or over the land of Judea only, as our Translators thought, we do not take upon us to determine; though we incline to the latter: but, whether more or less, it could not proceed from a natural cause. It could not be an eclipse, because the moon at that time was at the full: and even if it had been an eclipse, it could not have been total for more than a quarter of an hour; whereas this continued for the space of three hours. It was manifestly a miraculous darkness, produced by the almighty power of God, and *that* too for ends worthy of a Divine interposition. It was,

I. An attestation to our Saviour's character—

[It was ordained of God, that every species of testimony should be given to his Son, in confirmation of his claims as the true Messiah. The particular kinds of testimony were, many hundreds of years before, made the subject of prophecy: and they were almost all of such a nature, as to be independent

^a Josh. x. 12, 13.

^b 2 Kin. xx. 11.

^c The sixth hour corresponded with our noon.

independent of his own followers, and consequently incapable of being brought to effect by any concerted plan of theirs. The miracle now exhibited was of that kind: for the whole creation could not have produced such a change in the face of nature: and as it could not be counterfeited, so neither could it be denied: it carried its own evidence along with it.

That this darkness was foretold; we cannot doubt^d. The prophet Joel most indisputably refers to it^e: for an inspired Apostle quotes his very words, and declares, that those words related to events which were to happen at that precise period, *for the express purpose of attesting the Messiahship of Christ*^f.

Behold then a proof which cannot reasonably be doubted. True it is, that the Jewish Historian does not record the fact: but we well know how averse he was to mention any thing that tended to the honour of Christianity, and therefore can account easily for his omission of so extraordinary an interposition of the Deity in confirmation of our religion. But the fact itself is undeniable: and if the three days' darkness in Egypt was a convincing testimony from God to the mission of Moses, so was this to the Messiahship of Christ.]

II. An emblem of his sufferings—

["Darkness" is often used in Scripture as a figurative representation of affliction^g— — — But it was peculiarly proper as an emblem on this occasion. Our blessed Lord was under the hidings of his Father's face, and in the depths of dereliction cried, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" His sufferings were such as no finite imagination can conceive. The torments which men inflicted on his body were small, in comparison of those which he now endured in his soul. All the hosts of hell were, as it were, let loose upon him; as He himself says, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness^h." Above all, the wrath of God was now poured out upon him, as the Surety and Substitute of a guilty world; according to that declaration of the Prophet, "It pleased the Lord to bruise himⁱ." Under such circumstances, what in the compass of created nature could so fitly represent his sufferings as the event before us^k? Hear the description given of those sufferings by the prophet David^l — — — and no wonder "the sun went down over him, and the day was dark, when he had no answer from his God."]

III. A prognostic of the judgments that should come upon his enemies—

[These

^d Am. viii. 9. ^e Joel ii. 30—32. ^f Acts ii. 16, 19—21.

^g Isai. v. 30. & viii. 22. Ezek. xxxii. 7, 8. ^h Luke xxii. 53.

ⁱ Isai. liii. 10.

^k Compare Mic. iii. 6, 7. with Ps. xxii. 1, 2. where the *image* as applied to the false prophets corresponds with the *fact* as exemplified in our Lord.

^l Ps. lxxxviii. 3, 6, 7, 14, 16.

[These were spoken of by Moses and all the Prophets; and *that* too under the image which we are considering^m — — — The prophet Amos, in a fore-cited passage, connects the calamities which they should endure with the very event which prefigured themⁿ. Our blessed Lord also foretold them in language not dissimilar^o. And how awfully have these predictions been verified! Surely from the foundation of the world there has never been an instance of any nation suffering such various, accumulated, and continued calamities as they. The darkness of their minds too, no less than the wretchedness of their condition, shews to what an extent the wrath of God is upon them: for a veil is upon their hearts, thicker than even that which obscured the meridian sun. O that at last the veil might be taken away, and that the light of God's countenance might be once more lifted up upon them!]

Though this subject may appear unconnected with practice, it may be justly IMPROVED,

1. For the humbling of the impenitent—

[How awful does the insensibility of man appear, when we see even the material creation more affected, as it were, at the death of Christ, than they! It is a fact, that many who have heard of the death of Christ times without number, and who profess to believe that he died for their sins, have yet never once mourned for those sins which nailed him to the accursed tree. Were they to hear of the slightest accident that had befallen their friend or relative, or any trifling loss which they themselves had sustained, they would be affected with it: but the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory is heard of by them without any emotion, even though they themselves were the guilty causes of his death. But let such ungrateful people know, that if ever they be brought to a just sense of their sins, they will "look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born^p." The Lord hasten this penitential season to every one of us!^q! — — —]

2. For the comforting of the afflicted—

[It is not uncommon to find persons deeply distressed on account of the hidings of God's face. And we acknowledge that they have cause to be distressed; because it is the most afflictive of all events, and because it never takes place but for the correction of some evil in them. Our blessed Lord, though he had no sin of his own, had evil enough upon him, even

^m Isai. xliii. 9—11. Jer. xv. 1, 2, 3, 9.

ⁿ Am. viii. 9, 10.

^o Mark xiii. 24—26, 30.

^p Zech. xii. 10.

^q Jer. xliii. 15, 16.

724.] SIGNS ATTENDANT ON OUR LORD'S DEATH. 367

even the sins of the whole world: and Job, though in some sense he was "a perfect man," had much to learn and much to attain. Yet let not any one despond, as though the cheerful light of the sun should no more appear: but let those who "walk in darkness and have no light, learn to trust in the Lord, and to stay themselves upon their God:" and then "their light shall rise in obscurity, and their darkness be as the noon-day."]

3. For the encouraging of all—

[Reviving are those words of the apostle John, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." All that was obscure in the death of Christ is now made plain; and, blessed be God! the whole mystery of Redemption is now exhibited before our eyes. Yes, on us "the Sun of Righteousness has arisen with healing in his wings." But as we know not how long the light shall continue with us, let us "walk in the light whilst we have it, lest darkness come upon us." If any thing in the dispensations either of providence or of grace be dark to us at the present, let us contentedly say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter;" and let us wait in patience for that world, where "our sun shall no more go down, neither shall our moon withdraw itself; but the Lord will be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended."]

^r Isai. l. 10.

^t John xii. 35.

^s 1 John ii. 8.

^u Isai. lx. 20.

DCCXXIV.

THE SIGNS ATTENDANT ON OUR LORD'S DEATH.

Matt. xxvii. 51. *And behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.*

THE incarnation and death of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son are facts so incredible, that nothing but a concurrence of the most unquestionable proofs can justify us in believing the Scripture-report concerning them. But God has been pleased to give us proofs equal to the occasion. The birth of Christ was attested by a multitude of angels, who were sent from heaven to announce and celebrate the event: and the death of Christ was attested by a variety of signs and wonders, which could not fail to

to impress all whose minds were open to conviction. The miraculous darkness for the space of three hours at mid-day has been already noticed : and we have now to notice two other phenomena, the earthquake, and the rending of the veil. We may suppose indeed that these two events might happen without any particular interposition of Providence to effect them, or any particular end to be answered by them : but such a construction is altogether precluded, both by the prophetic declarations respecting them, and by the light thrown upon them in the New Testament. It shall be our endeavour at this time,

I. To illustrate these phenomena—

These, like the miraculous darkness, may be considered as testimonies from God to the truth of Christ's Messiahship : but we shall direct our attention to them rather as *signs*, or *emblematic representations*, of mysteries at that time accomplished. In this view let us notice,

1. The earthquake—

[This had been predicted by the prophet Haggai^a : and though we might have justly regarded the expressions used by him as designating only some great political convulsion, yet we have reason to think that they had a literal accomplishment in the event before us. It must be remembered, that, at the giving of the Law, "the whole of Mount Sinai quaked greatly^b." Thus at the termination of that, and the introduction of the Christian dispensation, a similar miracle was wrought ; "the earth quaked to its very centre, and the rocks were rent asunder:" and we are warranted by an inspired Apostle to declare, that that phenomenon shadowed forth the abolition of the whole Jewish economy, and the establishment of Christianity in its place^c. It is observable, too, that the Apostle lays all the stress on one particular word of the Prophet ; (a word which superficial readers would have overlooked ;) and shews, that it was intended by God himself to *foretell*, and to *explain*, the earthquake which we are now speaking of. The tabernacle and all the things belonging to it were "*made*" by the hands of men, and therefore were not intended to continue beyond a certain period : but, under the Christian dispensation, every thing is spiritual and of

Divine

^a Hag. ii. 6, 7, 21.

^b Exod. xix. 18. Ps. xviii. 7.

^c Heb. xii. 26, 27.

Divine origin, and consequently is destined to endure for ever: the removal of the former, therefore, and the establishment of the latter, being fixed in the Divine counsels, they were predicted by the Prophet, and expressly marked in that one word which the Apostle so correctly notices; "*This word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things, that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken, may remain.*"

What obligations do we owe to God for the light which the New Testament reflects on the Jewish writings, and for the confirmation which it receives from them! No uninspired author could ever have discovered such mysteries in so obscure a passage; nor can any one who beholds this inspired exposition of it, withhold his admiration of the unfathomable depths of God's wisdom and knowledge.]

2. The rending of the veil—

[This was not a mere accident arising from the earthquake, but an appointment of God for the fuller manifestation of his own purpose and grace.

There were two veils in the temple; the one separating the holy place from the outer court, and the other separating the holy place from the holy of holies. This latter veil was for the purpose of screening from the view of men the ark and the Shechinah, that bright symbol of the Deity. This was the veil that was "rent in twain from the top to the bottom:" and the rending of it denoted three things; first, *That the rending of Christ's body was the means of bringing us nigh to God*; next, *that the mysteries which had hitherto been hid in God were now fully revealed*; and, lastly, *that a new way of access to God was now opened for all people.*

Christ speaks of his own body as being typified by the Temple^d: and well he might do so, since "in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." But as opening a way for our admission to the Divine presence, it was more particularly typified by *the veil*; the rending of which marked the violent nature of his death, and the blessed effects resulting from it. This is declared by an inspired Apostle, who, speaking of our having "a way consecrated for us through *the veil*," adds, "*that is to say, his flesh.*" And this accords with innumerable assertions of holy Writ, which declare that "Christ hath made peace for us by the blood of his cross," and that, whereas we were once "alienated from God, and enemies to him in our minds by wicked works, he hath now reconciled us to him *in the body of his flesh through death*."^e

Moreover, the mystical intent of all the types and figures

was.

^d John ii. 19, 21.

^e Col. i. 20—22.

was now exhibited in the clearest view. As the veil on the face of Moses intimated, that the Jews could not discern the end and reason of the ceremonial law, and "the taking away of that veil in Christ" enables us to "behold, as in a glass or mirror, the glory of the Lord;" so the rending of the veil shews us, that all the ends of the ceremonial law were fulfilled in Christ, and that to us is given the substance of what the Jewish Church possessed only in types and shadows. If we do not now comprehend the glorious designs of God in the work of Redemption, it is not because he has interposed a veil to hide them from us, but because we have a veil upon our own hearts, which we have not desired him to take away. "It must be our fault, I say, and not his; for from that hour in which Christ died upon the cross, and especially from that hour when the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, to reveal him unto men; "the face of the covering that had been cast over all people was destroyed, and the veil that had been spread over all nations was taken away^f."

But that which was most fully and most immediately intended by the rending of the veil, was, to open for all people a free and personal access to God, that so they might obtain all his blessings for themselves, without the intervention of carnal sacrifices, and an earthly priesthood. To shew to men that no such access was allowed them under the law, was the *use and intent* of the veil^g; and to make that way open both to Jews and Gentiles, was the design of God in rending the veil^h. This further appears from the *time* when the veil was rent: for it was *at the time of the evening sacrifice*, when the priests were in the holy place, trimming the sacred lamps, and offering incense before the Lord. They, of course, must have beheld the interior of the sanctuary; and therefore had in themselves an evidence, that God had opened for them a new way of access unto his throne. This is called "*a new and a living way*;" *new*, because it never was revealed before; and *living*, because it would secure eternal life to all who should come in it; whereas, if even the High Priest himself had presumed to enter through the veil on any other than the day of atonement, or in any other manner than that prescribed by the law, he would have been struck dead upon the spot, or have been put to death as a presumptuous transgressor: but now every person in the universe may come to God, and find acceptance with him at his mercy-seat: if only he take the blood of his great Sacrifice, and bring it by faith to the throne of God, he shall find that there no longer exists
any

^f Isai. xxv. 7, 8.

^g Heb. ix. 7, 8. "The Holy Ghost this signifying, &c."

^h Heb. x. 19, 20. with Eph. iii. 18.

any difference between "Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female, but that we are all one in Christ Jesus!"

Such is clearly the import of these phenomena: we now come,

II. To shew the improvement we should make of them—

Here we might suggest many things; but for brevity sake we shall confine ourselves to two, which are particularly suggested by the holy Apostle. We should,

1. Receive and honour the dispensation which God has introduced—

[Consider the nature of that dispensation which preceded it; how dark, how unsatisfactory, how burthensome! — — — Compare with it the dispensation under which we live, a dispensation of light and liberty, of peace and joy — — — See the two contrasted by the Apostle^k; and then hear him declaring the abolition of the one, and the establishment of the other, and prescribing our duty in reference to that which we are privileged to enjoy^l: hear too the argument with which he enforces an obedient attention to it: He reminds us of the judgments which fell on Corah, Dathan, and Abiram, for refusing to comply with God's former appointments, which were carnal and earthly, and appeals to us respecting the impossibility of our escaping, if we disregard those which are spiritual and heavenly, since God, at this time, no less than formerly, is, to those who offend him, "a consuming fire^m." Comply then with the commands of God, and "receive not the grace of God in vain." Only remember wherein the main difference between the two dispensations consists: the one consisted altogether of forms and shadows; the other contains the substance: in the one, the sacrifices were beasts of the field, and the Priests who offered them were guilty creatures like ourselves; in the other, CHRIST is our Sacrifice, and our Great High Priest; and in his Mediation and intercession must be all our salvation and all our hope. The earthquake shook the whole legal fabrick, and removed it all, so that the Church is liberated from all its observances: in like manner must all *legal principles* be removed from us; and the freedom granted to the Church, must be realized in our hearts — — — In a word, we must be "new creatures in Christ Jesus: old things must pass away, and all things must become new."]

2. Avail

^l Gal. iii. 28.

^k Heb. xii. 18—24.

^l Heb. xii. 25—29.

^m ib.

2. Avail ourselves of the liberty which he has conferred upon us—

[God invites us all to come to him without fear: He says, "Draw nigh to me, and I will draw nigh to you" — — — But here is the difficulty. To be outward-court worshippers is easy enough: but to get within the veil, to approach God as seeing him that is invisible, to pour out our souls before him, to ask with a full assurance of obtaining whatsoever we stand in need of; to live in the habit of such intercourse with him as enables us to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ;" *this* requires continual watchfulness and unintermitted exertion. Yet this is the state to which we ought to aspire. The Apostle, after having, in a fore-cited passage, told us, that we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High Priest over the House of God;" adds, "Let us draw near with a true heart; in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." This is the glorious privilege to which we are brought. None need to stand at a distance; the golden sceptre is held out equally to all; and "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." We are all, without exception, "a royal *priesthood*;" he who "hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, hath also made us kings and *priests* unto our God." Let none then stand at a distance as unworthy to approach him, but let us go even to his throne, and "open our mouths wide that he may fill them" — — —]

^a Heb. x. 19—22.

1 Pet. ii. 9. Rev. i. 5, 6.

DCCXXV.

THE GUARDING OF THE SEPULCHRE.

Matt. xxvii. 62—66. *Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the Chief Priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way; make it as sure*

sure as you can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

THE enmity of the human heart against God will never cease to operate, till the heart itself be changed by Divine grace. One would have hoped that, when so many wonders had been wrought during the crucifixion of Christ, when the whole multitude that were spectators of it smote their breasts with grief, when the Centurion and others of the Heathen soldiers were constrained to attest his innocence, and to proclaim him to be the Son of God, and, lastly, when they had seen some of their own body, even Members of the Supreme Council, paying the most marked respect to his dead body, and committing it to the tomb with funeral honours; one would have hoped, I say, that the malice of the Chief Priests and Pharisees would have somewhat abated. But they were still restless: not content with having put him to death, and thereby destroyed, as they imagined, all his influence in the world, they pretended to fear that his Disciples would come and take him from the tomb, and spread abroad a report that he had risen from the dead. They certainly had no reasonable ground for such a fear: for, to what purpose could it be for the Disciples to carry on such a delusion, when they could not gain any thing by it but misery in this world, and destruction in the world to come? But the Chief Priests wanted to pluck up by the very roots this dangerous heresy, as they esteemed it; and to prove to all that Jesus was an Impostor. For this purpose they determined to secure the tomb, till the time of his predicted resurrection should be passed; and accordingly made their application to Pilate, for such assistance as they judged necessary.

Let us consider,

I. The precautions they used to secure the tomb—

[They remembered that Jesus had repeatedly foretold his resurrection on the third day: and they well knew, that, if the report of such an event should be circulated and credited, it would confirm his influence to such a degree that they should

should never be able to subvert it. They conceived that they had been guilty of a great error in suffering Jesus to live so long: and, if now they should leave it in the power of his Disciples to practise a deceit by stealing away the body, and affirming that he was risen, their "last error would be worse than the first." They therefore, notwithstanding it was the Sabbath, went in a body to Pilate, to request that measures might instantly be taken to defeat any such plot: Yes, though they had often been filled with indignation against Jesus for performing acts of mercy on the Sabbath, they themselves felt no hesitation in violating the sanctity of it, in order to accomplish their malignant purposes.

In their address to Pilate, they designate our adorable Lord as a "deceiver," whose imposture they are determined to detect. They branded him with this ignominious name, well knowing the influence which such appellations have in influencing the decisions of timid or ungodly men.

Pilate acceded to their request, and gave orders that a guard of soldiers from the Castle of Antonia should be at their disposal. These therefore they placed around the sepulchre: and, lest any collusion should exist between them also and the Disciples, they put a seal upon the stone that closed the sepulchre; and thus secured themselves equally against fraud and violence: the Disciples could not overcome an armed guard; nor could the guard connive at their taking away the body without being immediately discovered.]

Let us next consider,

II. The advantage derived from thence to the cause of Christ—

[Not all the Disciples together could have devised a plan that should render such benefit to their own cause as this did. It is true, that Christ's frequent appearances after his resurrection might remove all doubt from the minds of the Disciples; but still, if no precautions had been used to secure the tomb, there would ever remain some plausibility in the assertion, that the Disciples had stolen away the body, and that some other man had personated him in his various appearances, and thereby deceived the multitude. But behold, the enemies of Christ themselves destroy all foundation for such a conceit: and the very means they used to subvert the religion of Christ, have established it on a basis that can never be shaken. By the placing of a guard, the Roman soldiers themselves became witnesses of his resurrection: they immediately declared the event to the Chief Priests and Pharisees, who gave them large sums of money to conceal the matter^a; and thus the Priests themselves, even the whole Sanhedrim,

^a Matt. xxviii. 11—15.

Sanhedrim, became witnesses of the same. They were forced to invent some story to justify their continued rejection of Christ; but the idea of the whole guard (it is thought of sixty soldiers) being asleep at once, when the penalty of death was annexed to that offence, and the Disciples being able to remove the large stone from the door of the sepulchre, and to take away the body without so much as waking one of the soldiers, is too ridiculous to obtain the smallest degree of credit. That this should be done too, and no one of the soldiers be called to an account for it, when their neglect had, on this supposition, defeated the most ardent wishes of the Jewish Rulers, is inconceivable, especially when we know what was the state of the Rulers' minds at that time.

Now we can easily conceive what would have been the effect, if Jesus had not risen, and the Jewish Rulers had been able, at the expiration of the third day, to bring forth the body, and to shew it to the people: they would thus have proved indisputably that Jesus was an impostor, and would have destroyed in a moment all the influence of his name. But their defeat has established the truth of our Religion beyond a possibility of contradiction: Yes, we desire no better evidences of its truth, than those which the Roman soldiers and the Jewish Sanhedrim have thus unwittingly afforded us: so that we may well say, "Their last error was worse than the first;" for, if their forbearance gave Jesus an opportunity of propagating his religion, this device of theirs proved to demonstration the fact on which his religion rests; and has thereby precluded all excuse for their obstinate unbelief.]

We would now suggest,

III. Some general deductions from the subject,

Truly this is a triumphant subject to the Christian: for though we cannot but mourn at the idea that our blessed Lord should be treated with such indignities, we are constrained to triumph, when we see how all the efforts of his enemies were overruled for the manifestation of his glory. But there are two thoughts in particular which we would suggest as arising from this transaction:

1. How vain are the counsels of ungodly men!

[Doubtless the Chief Priests and Pharisees exulted in the hope that they had now attained complete success: but their devices were turned to their own confusion. It was thus throughout the whole history of our Blessed Lord, and especially in the diversified events of his last hours: his ene-
mies

mies plotted together, and executed all their malignant purposes against him; but behold, in all that they did, they unwittingly “fulfilled the Scriptures^b” so that not one word of all the prophecies was left unaccomplished. In one sense they were *Satan’s* agents; for it was “he who put it into their hearts” to reject and crucify their Messiah: but in another sense, they were instruments in the hands of *God*, to execute the things which “his hand and his counsel had determined before to be done^c.” Thus also it has been with all who have conspired against the Lord in every age: he has invariably “disappointed the devices of the crafty,” and “taken the wise in their own craftiness^d.” Two objects his enemies always have in view; the one is, to injure his people, and the other is, to defeat his cause: but they are made, against their will, to advance the interests of both. In the history of Job we are informed, how Satan exerted himself in every possible way to ruin that holy man: but, after all his efforts, he only rendered Job the more exalted monument of grace, and augmented the happiness which he laboured to destroy^e. In like manner, the enemies of the Church have been uniformly baffled in all their attempts against it. They put to death that eminent disciple, Stephen; and raised a persecution against the whole Church, so that none, except the Apostles, dared any longer to continue at Jerusalem: but the effect of their persecution was, to destroy one preacher, and to raise up a thousand in his stead^f. At another time, having directed their hostility against the apostle Paul, they prevailed so far as to get him confined in prison for two whole years. What a deadly blow must this, as we should think, have given to the Church! yet St. Paul himself tells us, that it “turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel;” since many in Cæsar’s palace, who would otherwise have never heard the word, were brought to the knowledge of it; and multitudes, when they saw his faith and patience, were stirred up to tread in his steps, and “to preach the word without fear^g.” Thus it ever has been; and thus it ever shall be: for Solomon tells us, “There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord^h,” on the contrary, how “many soever devices there may be in the hearts of men, the counsel of the Lord, and that only, shall standⁱ.” “The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder,” which would not subserve his purposes, “shall he restrain^j.”]

2. How

^b Acts xiii. 27.

^d Job v. 12, 13.

^f Acts viii. 1, 4.

^h Prov. xxi. 30.

^j Ps. lxxvi. 10.

^c Acts iv. 25—28.

^e Job xlii. 9, 10. with Jam. v. 11.

^g Phil. i. 12—14.

ⁱ Prov. xix. 21.

2. How happy are they who have God on their side!

[Whilst the Jewish Rulers were plotting together for the utter subversion of Christianity, the Disciples were unconscious of their machinations, or overwhelmed with despair. But God is the friend of all his people, "an ever-present help in the time of trouble." He is pleased to characterize himself by this very name, "The Saviour of them that trust in him^k." He permits indeed his enemies to triumph for a season; but he warns them of the fearful issue of their conspiracies against him^l. As far as they prevail, they ascribe all their success to their own wisdom and power: but he reproves their folly, and visits upon them those very iniquities, which he has rendered subservient to the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels^m. As for his own people, he encourages them to put their trust in him, without suffering themselves to be alarmed at the menaces of their enemies, or harbouring any fears about their ultimate successⁿ. What their happy state should be, we see in the actual experience of David. He contemplates God in the character of an Almighty Protector^o, and, when urged by an Alarmist to indulge desponding fears, he nobly replies, "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven^p." He even appeals to the whole world, what cause he can have for fear, whilst he has such an Almighty Friend for his support^q. Such is the privilege of all his people: if "they believe in him, they shall not make haste through unbelieving fears^r: on the contrary, "their very thoughts shall be established^s." In a word, they shall, though beset with enemies on every side, be preserved as in a royal pavilion, and have such an inward sense of the Divine presence as shall comfort them under every trouble, or rather screen them from trouble, and fill them with joy unspeakable and glorified^t.]

^k Ps. xvii. 7. Jer. xiv. 8.

^l Isai. viii. 7—10.

^m Isai. x. 5, 6, 7, 12, 17.

ⁿ Isai. viii. 12—14.

^o Ps. xviii. 2.

^p Ps. xi. 1—4. N.B. To the end of the third verse is the speech of the Alarmist.

^q Ps. xxvii. 1.

^r Isai. xxviii. 16.

^s Prov. xvi. 3.

^t Ps. xxxi. 20.

DCCXXVI.

THE SCOPE OF OUR LORD'S MINISTRY.

Mark i. 14, 15. *Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came*

came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel.

THOSE Christians who have taken up religion lightly, and have not the root of Divine grace within them, will, as soon as persecution threatens them, be ready to renounce their holy profession; whilst those who have been influenced by a truly Christian principle, will be intimidated by nothing. When Paul was imprisoned at Rome, some were ashamed of his chain and forsook him: but others “waxed confident by his bonds, and were much more bold to speak the word without fear^a.” This is the true spirit of Christianity, and agrees with the example which Christ himself has set us. St. John was cast into prison for his fidelity in executing the ministerial office. But no sooner did our Lord hear of his imprisonment, than he went into Galilee, where John himself had been preaching, and bore testimony to the very truths which John himself had maintained. The scope of John’s Ministry had been, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand^b!” and the instant that this holy man was precluded from any further discharge of his Ministry, our blessed Lord insisted on the same awakening topic: saying, “The time *is* fulfilled, and the kingdom of God *is* at hand: Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.”

To elucidate this important subject, we shall shew,

I. What is the kingdom here spoken of—

The terms used respecting it in our text, sufficiently shew what we are to understand by it:

1. It is the kingdom of God—

[Every kingdom may be considered as his, inasmuch as he is the founder of all the empires upon earth: “he pulleth down one, and setteth up another.” But *this* is his in a more eminent manner. It is an empire which he raises over the souls of men: it is erected, not by means of carnal weapons, but by an invisible and spiritual influence which he exerts over their minds, whereby he “brings them into captivity to the obedience of Christ^c.” It is not an empire determined by

^a Phil. i. 14.

^b Matt. iii. 1, 2.

^c 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

by any particular boundaries, but spread over the face of the whole earth. His laws are written in the hearts of his subjects, and reach to the thoughts and desires, as much as to their outward actions. "It comes not with observation" and pomp, as other kingdoms: it is seated altogether "within men," and consists in "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost^d." His subjects have peculiar privileges, such as no other people upon earth can partake of: but these are altogether of a spiritual nature, and invisible to carnal eyes. Their king is ever with them; every one of them has access to him at all times: and all that he possesses is theirs. His power is incessantly put forth for the protection and support of every individual amongst them; he orders every thing for their good, and is ever occupied in making them happy; giving them a peace which passeth understanding, and a joy which is unspeakable and glorified. In short, it is frequently called "the kingdom of heaven;" as it well may be, seeing that it is an exact counterpart of that which is in heaven, and differs only from that in its measure and degree. If only we conceive of God reigning amongst his saints and angels in heaven, it will help us more than any thing else to understand the nature of his kingdom on earth: the laws of both realms, yea, and the privileges too, are the same: holiness is the law both of the upper and the lower realm^e; and happiness in God is their one great privilege. The two are allied to each other as the acorn and the oak: grace, is glory begun; and glory, is grace consummated.]

2. It is a kingdom which was at that time to be established—

[The Prophets had spoken clearly of a kingdom which was to be erected by the Messiah at an appointed period^f; and it was generally understood, not only among the Jews; but among the Gentiles also, that the time was nearly arrived. What the Samaritan Woman said, "We know that the Messiah is coming," may be considered as the public voice at that time. Now our blessed Lord says respecting it, "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand:" and he commanded his Disciples to declare the same; and, in the event of their message being despised, he bade them declare with increased vehemence to the very people who should reject them; "Be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you^g."

This then decidedly shews, that the kingdom here spoken of was the Messiah's kingdom, even that which, in name at least, is established amongst us: in name, I say, because "all are

^d Rom. xiv. 17.

^e Ezek. xlii. 10—12.

^f Dan. ii. 44. & vii. 13, 14.

^g Luke x. 9, 11.

are not Israel who are of Israel," "nor is he a Jew who is one outwardly." It has before been observed that this is a Spiritual kingdom; and the subjects of it are Spiritual subjects.]

This leads us to shew,

II. What we must do in order to become subjects of it—

We have no need to emigrate from one country to another in order to place ourselves under the dominion of Christ. There is a way appointed for all to have their names enrolled among his people; and that is,

1. To repent—

[This is a duty independent of Christianity: every one that has violated the holy laws of God, ought to be deeply humbled for his iniquities. But this is an indispensable requisite for our admission into the Redeemer's kingdom. An impenitent sinner, whether his sins have been more or less heinous, cannot possibly be numbered with his subjects. Such a man hates the laws by which they are governed; he will not yield to the authority which they obey: he even despises the privileges which they consider as their most inestimable treasure: whatever therefore he may call himself, he is, in fact, an enemy, a rebel, a traitor; and as such he will be considered by that king to whom he has professed allegiance — — — In order to become "a fellow-citizen with the saints," he must himself become a saint. Till then, he is accounted "a stranger and a foreigner"^h — — —]

2. To believe the Gospel—

[Repentance is necessary to prepare men for the kingdom; but it is faith which actually introduces them into it. The Gospel sets forth Christ, not merely as "a Prince, but as a Saviour also." It represents him as having borne our sins in his own body on the cross, and as having made thereby a full and perfect satisfaction to God for them. It assures us also of a complete reconciliation with him, the very moment that we embrace its glorious truths. On our believing its testimony, we begin to see the Lord Jesus in his true character: we no more account him an hard Master, but one whose service is perfect freedom. We then long to have our very thoughts subjected to his dominion, and our whole souls made obedient to his will. Thus we become enlisted under his

^h Eph. ii. 19.

his banners, and entitled to all the privileges of his subjects — — — In short, by repentance we cast down the weapons of our rebellion; and by faith we devote ourselves to him as his peculiar people.]

This subject furnishes us with abundant matter,

1. Of inquiry—

[Should it not be an object of anxious inquiry with us all to ascertain whose subjects we are? There are but two, who divide between them the dominion of the world: Satan is the god of this world, who has usurped a power over all mankind: but of these, Jehovah, the Creator of all things, has a few, whom he has rescued and redeemed from his tyrannic sway. If we belong to Christ, God has brought us "out of the kingdom of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Inquire then whether such a change has taken place? Inquire whether you have deeply repented of your past subjection to Satan, and whether with humble gratitude you have fled for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel? Can you appeal to God that you have returned to him as a base rebel, acknowledging your desert of death, and imploring mercy solely in the name of Christ? Can you appeal to him, that you do yet daily, and hourly as it were, give up yourselves to his service, desiring to live, and, if need be, to die, for him? — — — O consider the importance of these inquiries, and the proneness of your hearts to self-deceit! — — — And pray to God to instruct you by his Holy Spirit, that you may know, before it is too late, whose you are, and whom you serve — — —]

2. Of humiliation—

[Be it granted, that we are the Lord's: still what cause for shame have the very best amongst us, when we think how little love we bear to our heavenly King, and how little zeal we have manifested in his service. The subjects of earthly monarchs will go to the very ends of the earth to preserve and to extend *their* territories. Life seems of no value to them; in-comparison of the honour of their prince: to die in his cause appears an object of ambition rather than of dread: and the smallest testimony of his favour is deemed an ample recompence for all the dangers and difficulties that can be endured. Ah! who does not blush at the consideration of these things? If called to preach his Gospel to the Heathen, who does not demur, and ask a thousand questions, which shew, that our own ease is of more importance in our eyes than his honour? Even a contemptuous look, or a reproachful name, or some little sacrifice of worldly interest, are often sufficient

sufficient to deter us from embracing opportunities of exalting him. Whose conscience does not reproach him as shamefully deficient in duty to the best of Kings, and in gratitude towards the greatest of Benefactors? Truly when we consider what sovereign mercy, what almighty power, and what unbounded grace have been exercised towards us, we may well mourn and weep on the retrospect of every day, and at the review of every hour — — —]

3. Of thankfulness—

[We ought not to compare ourselves with others for the purpose of fostering self-preference and pride; yet we may well take occasion from the state of all around us to admire and adore that grace which has caused us to differ from them. For though, in the view of our attainments, we have need of humiliation, yet, in the view of our high privileges, we have cause for most exalted joy: and if we felt as we ought, our every act would be obedience, and our every word be praise.

Nor is there wanting abundant cause of thankfulness even to those who are yet in rebellion against him. What reason have they to bless his name, that he has not yet said, "Bring hither those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me!" What a blessing should they account it that his Gospel is yet sounding in their ears; and that they may yet, if only they will repent and believe the Gospel, be partakers of his kingdom and glory! People are apt to think us harsh and severe when we call them to repentance: but we call you to repentance and faith, not as duties, but as privileges. What a privilege would those who are now in hell account it, if they could have one more such message delivered to them from the Lord! Know ye then, Beloved, that "this is the accepted time:" I pray God, ye may find it also "the day of salvation."]

DCCXXVII.

THE USE AND BENEFIT OF THE SABBATH.

Mark ii. 27. *And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

IN nothing is the force of prejudice more strongly seen, than in the blame cast by the world upon the followers of Christ for the most trifling offence, whilst the greatest enormities of ungodly men are suffered to pass without any animadversion whatever. Nor is it only for a real deviation from duty that they are condemned,

condemned, but for the smallest departure from rules, which have their foundation in nothing but human policy or superstition. The Disciples of our Lord had been attending the Synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and, being hungry^a, they plucked some ears of corn as they passed through the corn-fields, and ate it. This was an act which God himself had particularly specified as lawful^b; and therefore the Pharisees could not condemn it: but the law forbade men to do any servile work upon the Sabbath-day; and therefore the Pharisees, being determined to find fault, construed the plucking and rubbing a few ears of corn as a reaping and threshing of the corn; and inquired with indignation, Why they presumed to do so on the Sabbath-day^c? But our blessed Lord vindicated their conduct: he shewed that works of necessity or mercy might be performed, as well on the Sabbath as on any other day. He reminded them of David's conduct in eating the holy bread, which was forbidden to be eaten by any but the Priests and their families: he had never been censured for it either by God or man, because he was impelled to it by unavoidable necessity. He reminded them also of the Priests in the Temple, who performed very laborious work in killing, flaying, and consuming the sacrifices, yet incurred no guilt thereby, because they were serving God: and from these precedents he shewed them, that the Disciples were not worthy of blame, since what they had done was in attending upon HIM, and from a necessity imposed by the imperious calls of hunger. The sanctity of the Sabbath he acknowledged; but informed them at the same time, that, where the observance of it militated against the welfare of man, its authority was superseded; for that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

From this declaration of our Lord's, we shall take occasion to shew,

I. The

^a Matt. xii. 1.

^b Deut. xxiii. 25.

^c Matt. xii. 2. with Luke vi. 1, 2.

I. The end for which the Sabbath was instituted—

The appointment of the Sabbath did not take place, till the whole work of creation was complete: therefore man, who was created on the sixth day, could not be made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath, as far as man was concerned, must be made for him. But, without laying any stress on the priority of man's existence, we may confidently affirm, that the Sabbath was instituted for the benefit,

1. Of individuals—

[It is no small privilege to men that God has appointed them a day of rest, wherein they are to cease from the cares and labours of this world, and to attend to the concerns of another world^d. We know by experience how worldly occupations affect the mind; how powerfully they draw us from God, and impede us in the pursuit of heavenly things; and there is reason to fear, that if no such appointment had existed, we should, long ere this, have been immersed in heathen darkness: we should have been satisfied with the things of this life, and not thought of inquiring after any thing beyond. But on every return of this Sacred Rest, we are reminded, that there is a God whom we must serve, and that there is an eternal portion which it behoves us to secure. We are led to take a retrospective view of our past lives, in order to see what we have done for our souls, and what prospect we have of attaining that happiness, for which we were created, and for which we were redeemed. In short, this appointment of a Sabbath affords exactly the same occasion for advancing the welfare of our souls, as the permission to labour on the six other days does for the advancement of our temporal interests: as, on the six days, we devise and execute plans for the acquisition of wealth, so, on the seventh day, we are occupied in attaining higher degrees of faith and holiness: and as, in the one case, we frequently cast up our accounts in order to see what progress we have made, so in the other case, the periodical leisure that is afforded us, enables us to ascertain with precision the state of our souls before God.]

Who then has not reason to be thankful for an institution which is so replete with benefit to his soul? Well might God number it amongst the highest obligations which he had ever conferred upon his people, the Jews^e, and well may we number it amongst our choicest blessings.]

2. Of the whole community—

[Had

^d Exod. xxiii. 12. Deut. v. 14.

^e Neh. ix. 13, 14. Ezek. xx. 12—20.

[Had no specific time been appointed by God, none could ever have been agreed upon by men: no day would have suited the convenience of all; nor could human authority have prevailed to establish a law that should be universally and irrevocably obeyed. But God having fixed a day, the whole race of mankind is bound to yield obedience to his command: so that all who acknowledge his authority, wake upon the Sabbath with the same views, the same desires, the same purposes; all feeling in themselves an obligation to keep it holy, and all conscious that the same feeling pervades the Lord's people in every quarter of the globe. In respect to this, there is no difference of rank or station. The rich man sees that he is to lay aside both his cares and pleasures, in order to attend to the concerns of his soul: the poor man also sees, that though he may be, as it were, a slave on other days, on this day he is the Lord's free-man. Indeed the poor have very peculiar cause for thankfulness on account of the Sabbath; for the rate of wages in every country is calculated by the amount that is necessary to support a man and his family; and that is given to a man for six days' work, because God has commanded him to rest the seventh: but if no such command had been given by God, the poor would have been required to work the seven days without any augmentation of their wages: in this respect, therefore, the poor are peculiarly benefited. But indeed the whole community being thus set at liberty for heavenly pursuits, and means of instruction being provided for all, such instruction too as they would not very readily receive in private, all meet, as by common consent, in the House of God, and there offer their united sacrifices of prayer and praise. From thence all return to the bosom of their families, to diffuse a kindred spirit in their domestic circles, and thus to advance the temporal, no less than the eternal, happiness of themselves and others. Doubtless the degree in which these ends are promoted, must depend on the dispositions of the persons themselves; they who have no desire after spiritual blessings, will make no improvement of the opportunities afforded them: but they whose minds are spiritual, and whose situations in life preclude them from devoting much of their time to religion on other days, will now unite in social exercises, and in heavenly converse, with tenfold pleasure; and their hearts will burn within them whilst they speak of the things which God has done for their souls. Nor will these persons be contented with seeking good to themselves: they will endeavour to do good to others: they will think whether there be not some ignorant neighbour whom they can instruct, or some afflicted neighbour whom they can comfort. On this day the poor is on a par with the richest: his time is his own, to spend for God, either in a way of personal improvement, or for the edification of those around him.

Suppose then the Sabbaths to be thus employed, who can calculate the good accruing from them to all ranks and orders of men; to the rich and to the poor; to the man in health, and to the man immured in prison, or languishing on a bed of sickness; to those who are advanced in years, and those who are just entering on the stage of life?]

If, from these views of the Sabbath, we are made sensible of its value, let us consider,

II. The manner in which it should be improved—

It is not intended that we should be in bondage, as the Jews were; and much less that we should bear such an intolerable yoke as the Pharisees imposed on their disciples: yet we are bound to venerate the Sabbath, and to keep it holy. God has enjoined that duty with very peculiar solemnity; “Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.” In what manner we should keep it holy, the text will inform us: we should keep it,

1. With a grateful sense of our privilege—

[God, in infinite love and mercy, has made this day on purpose for us: he knew how much such a periodical season of reflection would conduce to our happiness, and therefore appointed the observance of it even in Paradise. To us, who are so corrupt and sinful, and are immersed in the cares and pleasures of an ensnaring world, this institution is still more important: and therefore, when we wake on a Sabbath morning, our first thought should be, “This is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” On rising from our beds, we should shut the door of our minds against the intrusion of worldly thoughts, and should set ourselves to the contemplation of heavenly subjects. We should invite our God to come and take possession of our souls, and to banish from thence every imagination that may interfere with his service or retard our spiritual improvement. We should consider what great objects are to be attained that day; what innumerable sins to be lamented; what great and precious promises to be embraced; what communion with God the Father, and with the Lord Jesus Christ, to be enjoyed; what grace, and mercy, and peace to be brought into the soul; what victories to be gained; what glory to be secured. Methinks, on retiring to our closet, we should say, Now, vain world, begone; let nothing belonging to thee interrupt me for a moment: welcome, precious Bible, thou inestimable

inestimable treasure; let me now unfold thy sacred pages, and obtain an insight into thy mysterious truths: and, O my God, "shine into my heart, to give me the light of the knowledge of thy glory in the face of Jesus Christ!" In short, precisely as a carnal man embraces with avidity an occasion of worldly gain, and uses with energy the means of accomplishing his desire, so should we regard every Sabbath with increased joy, and improve it with augmented diligence.

That this is really the proper way of sanctifying the Sabbath, we are sure; since it is the very way prescribed by God himself: nothing of a temporal nature should (any further than is absolutely necessary) be admitted into our minds; but our whole delight should be in the God of our salvation².]

2. With a humble sense of our responsibility—

[If God has instituted Sabbaths for our good, they are a talent of which we must give an account to him. And oh! what an awful responsibility have we incurred by means of them! A person that is seventy years of age has had no less than ten years of entire Sabbaths! What might not have been done in that time, if they had been properly improved? — — — When therefore the Sabbath arrives, though we should welcome it as a blessing, we should welcome it with fear and trembling; lest, when designed for our good, it should only aggravate our final condemnation. We should pray to God to raise our minds to the occasion; to spiritualize our affections; to draw nigh to us in our secret retirement, and to reveal himself to us in the public assembly. We should bear in mind, that without him we can do nothing; and that it is His presence and His blessing alone that can render any means effectual for our good. And when we come to the close of the Sabbath, we should inquire diligently, how far the designs of God's love and mercy have been accomplished in us, and how far we have been forwarded in our preparation for the eternal Sabbath. It is this mixture of "joy and trembling" which we ought to cultivate, as the most desirable of all frames; contented to wait for unmixed joy, till all our dangers and responsibility shall be for ever past.]

We cannot CONCLUDE without adding a word,

1. Of reproof—

[As for those who make scarcely any difference between the Sabbath and other days, but follow their business or pleasure in a shameless manner, we shall leave them to the reproof of Nehemiah³, only warning them that their present gains or pleasures will but ill repay them for the loss of their souls. Our present subject leads us rather to notice those

² 2 Cor. iv. 15. Isai. lviii. 13, 14.

who
³ Neh. xiii. 15, 16.

who detain their wives or servants at home, in order to provide them a more palatable repast. How different was the conduct of Christ and his Disciples! They had been so occupied in holy exercises, that they had even omitted to make the necessary provision for the calls of nature; and were contented to satisfy their appetite with a little barley rubbed out of the ears which they gathered by the way. It should seem that they were regardless of bodily indulgence, when they were called to attend to the concerns of their souls. O that we would learn of them, and imitate their self-denying piety! True it is, as we have said before, that works of mercy and necessity may be done; but it is equally true, that an attention to the soul is a work of the greatest mercy, and of indispensable necessity.]

2. Of encouragement—

[Though the alleged violation of the Sabbath was the pretext for condemning the Disciples, the real cause was their adherence to Christ. Thus, if some sacrifice of time or bodily comfort be made in order to serve our God, the proud Pharisees, who hate the light, will inveigh against us as violating some duty either to God or man; when, if we spent our time in any other way, they would find no occasion of offence at all. But, if we be treated thus, let us remember who suffered in like manner before us; and let us comfort ourselves with this reflection, that, though man may condemn our piety, our God will both approve and reward it.]

DCCXXVIII.

CHRIST'S LOVE TO HIS PEOPLE.

Mark iii. 31—35. *There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.*

IT is common for persons to feel an undue degree of solicitude for the bodily welfare of their friends, whilst they have little anxiety for the spiritual and eternal welfare of mankind at large. Hence, if a Minister be in danger of impairing his health by his exertions, they are ready to say to him, “ Spare thyself:”

self:" but, if thousands be perishing all around them for lack of knowledge, they are not so ready to stir him to increased activity and diligence. The near relations of our Lord were under the influence of this partial regard, when "they went out to lay hold on Jesus, and said of him, "He is beside himself;" or, as it might rather be translated, "He is transported too far^a." It should seem that it was with that view that they called for him at this time: they were afraid that he would sink under the weight of his continued labours. But he felt, that both health, and life too, were well sacrificed in such a cause: and therefore he disregarded their message, and turned it into an occasion of expressing the greatness of his regard for his obedient followers.

From the declaration of our Lord, we shall be led to shew,

I. The character of those whom Jesus loves—

This is expressed in few, but comprehensive words; "They do the will of God." But what is this will? It includes two things:

1. They believe in Jesus Christ—

[*This is eminently the will of God^b: and till this be done, nothing is done to any good purpose: the persons remain, and ever must remain, objects of his wrath^c — — — This therefore they do in the first place — — — And they do it humbly, renouncing utterly every other ground of hope — — — and thankfully adoring God from their inmost souls for such a refuge — — —*]

2. They seek after universal holiness—

[*This also is the will of God^d; nor are the loudest professions of attachment to Christ of any avail without it^e — — — And this also they do. And they do it unreservedly, accounting "no commandment grievous"^f — — — and in a progressive manner, never thinking they have attained, while any thing remains to be attained^g — — —*]

We pass on to consider,

II. The regard he bears towards them—

Our

^a ver. 20, 21. ὅτι ἐξέστη.

^c John iii. 18—36.

^e 1 John v. 3.

^b 1 John iii. 23. John vi. 29.

^d 1 Thess iv. 3.

^f Phil. iii. 12—14.

^e Matt. vii. 21.

Our Lord gives them the preference to his nearest relations, *as such*; and honours them with the most endearing appellations of brother, sister, mother. Now from this we must understand, that,

1. He bears the tenderest affection towards them—

[We naturally expect the warmest affection to subsist between persons so closely allied to each other. But the love that is found amongst earthly relatives is but a faint image of that which both Christ and his Father feel towards all their obedient followers^b — — —]

2. He will give them the most familiar access to him—

[His mother and his brethren were all this time without, whilst Jesus and his attentive followers were within, the house: and, though solicited by his own mother, he would not go out to *her*, because it would deprive *them* of the instructions which they were anxious to receive. And who can tell, what gracious communications Jesus will vouchsafe to those who serve him in spirit and in truth? They shall never seek his face in vain: they shall never call for him, but he will answer them, Here I am^c — — —]

3. He will order every thing for their good—

[Any man that is not devoid of principle will consult the good of his family, when the management of their affairs is committed to him. And will not Jesus, who is constituted “Head over all things for the express benefit of his Church^d,” be attentive to the wants of his obedient people? Will he not supply all their wants, mitigate all their sorrows, and overrule all things for their eternal good^e? — — —]

4. He will own them as his, in the last day—

[Suppose him in that day surrounded by the whole assembled universe; and many who were once related to him in the flesh, or who once professed themselves his followers, calling upon him, and saying, ‘We want a nearer access to thee; “we have eaten and drunk in thy presence; we have cast out devils in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works;” we are your brethren, your sisters, your nearest and dearest relatives.’ Methinks he will then renew the same gracious declaration that is contained in our text; “Who is my mother, or my brethren?” And then, “stretching out his hand towards his obedient followers, he will say, Behold

^b John xiv. 21.

^c Compare John xiv. 24. with Isai. lviii. 9. & lxxv. 24.

^d Eph. i. 22.

^e Rom. viii. 28.

Behold my mother, and my brethren: for, whosoever did the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”]

INFER,

1. How reasonable are the terms on which Christ proposes to acknowledge us as his disciples!

[He requires that all who would be his disciples should *apparently* cast off all regard for their nearest friends and relativesⁿ. I say *apparently*; for nothing is *really* farther from his intentions, than to encourage, either by *this* declaration, or by that in the text, any disrespect to our parents: on the contrary, we are commanded to *honour* our parents; and are told by the Apostle, that “that is the first commandment with promise.” But when our love or obedience to earthly parents stands in competition with our obedience to Christ, then we must resemble Levi; in commendation of whom it is, said, “He said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children^m.” And shall this appear harsh or unreasonable? See what Jesus has done for us: He knew not his mother and his brethren in comparison of his believing and obedient people: and shall we prefer our earthly relatives to him? If he has so loved us, who are altogether polluted, and deserve nothing but evil at his hands, how much more should we so love *him*, who is altogether lovely, and deserves infinitely more love at our hands than eternity will be sufficient to express!]

2. What encouragement have we to comply with these terms!

[In complying with the terms which Christ has proposed, and adhering to him in opposition to the will of earthly friends, we may possibly incur their displeasure, and feel to the uttermost of their power the effects of their resentment: they may frown upon us, disown us, disinherit us. But “when father and mother forsake us, the Lord will take us up.” His express promise is, that for one father, mother, brother, sister, house, or estate we lose for his sake, we shall even in this life receive an hundred fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, houses, and estatesⁿ. Does any one ask, How shall this be accomplished? We might answer, that it is abundantly verified in the regard shewn to us by the Lord’s people: but, independent of that, we say, the Lord Jesus will give himself to us, and be to us more than ten thousand relatives, or ten thousand worlds. Let any one say, whether the love of Christ, the grace of Christ, and the glory of Christ, do

not

ⁿ Luke xiv. 26.

^m Deut. xxxiii. 9. with Exod. xxxii. 26—28.

ⁿ Mark x. 29, 30.

not compensate an hundred-fold for all the creature-love, and all the temporal advantages, that we can lose for him? Let the determination then of Joshua be ours; that whatever course others may follow, and whatever obstacles they may lay in our way, "we, with God's help, will serve the Lord."]

3. How unlike to Christ are they, to whom a compliance with these terms is odious!

[None are so odious in the eyes of the ungodly world as the true, faithful, determined Christian. The generality, instead of loving him in proportion to his advancement in piety, will despise him; and will make his high attainments, not only *the occasion*, but *the measure*, of their contempt. They will be ashamed to acknowledge a pious character as a relation, or friend, or even as an acquaintance. They would rather be seen in public with an infidel or a debauchee, than with one who was eminent for his love to Christ. But how unlike to Christ are *they*; when the very thing which endears them to him, renders them odious in *their* eyes. Surely it will be well for such persons to consider what Christ's views of *them* must be? for if the godly are so precious to him *because* they are godly, surely the haters and despisers of godliness must for *that very reason* be most hateful in his eyes. Accordingly he has told us, how he will resent the contempt shewn to his people; and that "it were better for a man to have a millstone hanged about his neck, and to be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of his little ones."]

° Matt. xviii. 6.

DCCXXIX.

THE GUILT AND DANGER OF BEING ASHAMED OF CHRIST.

Mark viii. 38. *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

A SENSE of shame would never have been experienced, if man had abode in innocence. There is no room for shame in heaven, because there is no sin. But since man has become a guilty and corrupt creature,

creature, it is highly requisite that he should blush and be confounded before God. His shame should rise even to self-loathing and self-abhorrence. But so strangely has Satan blinded the eyes of men, that sin appears to them rather an object of glorying; and religion is regarded as the only thing of which we need to be ashamed. Hence iniquity is applauded, and piety decried. The Gospel, more especially, is made a butt of reproach and ridicule; and every method which the wit of man can devise, is used to bring vital godliness into disrepute and contempt. But our blessed Lord cautions his followers against yielding to the impressions of fear, or disguising their attachment to him through a wish to conciliate the esteem of men.

I. Who they are that are ashamed of Christ—

Though the “generation” amongst whom our Lord sojourned were distinguished for their wickedness, yet the present generation may with no less propriety be called “adulterous and sinful,” because the affections of men are almost universally alienated from God, their proper Lord and Husband, and the world with all its vanities is received to their embrace. That many among them should be ashamed of Christ and of his words, is the natural consequence of such a state of things. To determine who they are that answer to this character, we shall arrange them under distinct heads:

1. Those who openly disclaim all regard to Christ—

[How numerous this class is, a very little observation will suffice to teach us. The generality of men, if it were proved at this moment that there never had existed such a person as Jesus Christ, would have no one thing to alter in their conduct: *a sure proof that they never have paid any regard to him at all.* Indeed, they consider the fear of him as superstition, the love of him as enthusiasm, and all regard to him as a symptom of weakness and folly.

And what is this, but to “be ashamed of him,” or, as another Evangelist expresses it, to “deny him?” While they
represent

represent him as unworthy of any attention from his creatures, they degrade him as an impostor, and hold him up to universal contempt.]

2. Those who, while they feel some regard for him, are ashamed to manifest it before men—

[Many are persuaded in their minds, that the words of Christ are true, and that they who are obedient to them are the best and happiest of mankind : yet they dare not to unite themselves to this despised people, lest they should share in the obloquy that is cast upon them. They are ashamed to be seen conversing with any distinguished servant of Christ, or to be found in a Church where the Gospel is faithfully preached ; or if they venture to go thither at any time, they assume an air of levity and indifference foreign to their real feelings, merely that they may not be thought to be tinctured with enthusiasm, or to have come thither for any other end than curiosity and amusement. They can hear the Gospel defamed, and the professors of it condemned as hypocrites and fanatics, and not dare to open their lips in vindication of either : yea, they can even join in profane jesting themselves, much sooner than they can utter the real sentiments of their heart. Though, in a sense, they “ believe in Christ, they dare not confess him^a.” And what is this but to be ashamed of Christ ?]

3. Those who profess indeed a regard for him, but in circumstances of trial are afraid to maintain a consistent conduct—

[Many professors of religion are far from possessing that courage which is necessary to uphold them in times of persecution. Peter himself, though naturally courageous, was tempted to deny his Lord with oaths and curses : nor was he restored to God's favour without many tears and bitter lamentations. And is there not reason to fear that many of us, if brought into similar circumstances, would resemble him ? How few are there amongst us, who, like Daniel^b, would persist in the path of duty when all around them had departed from it, and when a cruel death must be the immediate consequence of their fidelity to Christ ? Yet the declining to sacrifice our lives in the cause of Christ would mark us out as persons ashamed of Christ, and subject us to his everlasting displeasure. Indeed it is to such characters that our Lord more immediately referred in the words before us^c ; and therefore we cannot hesitate to class them among those to whom the warning in our text is given.]

Respecting

^a John xii. 42.

^b Dan. vi. 10.

^c Compare ver. 35.

Respecting all these, our Lord plainly informs us of,

II. The treatment which they must expect at his hands—

There is a day coming, when “the Son of Man,” who is now treated with such contempt, will appear in all the brightness of “his Father’s glory,” surrounded with myriads of “his holy angels,” and will summon the universe to his tribunal. “*Then* will he be ashamed of those who *now* were ashamed of him”—

[His faithful servants he will then confess: he will declare, before all, his approbation of them, and his delight in them: he will welcome them as his brethren, and as joint-heirs of his eternal inheritance. But not one look of love will he vouchsafe to those who, through cowardice, or love of sin, had denied him. He will turn away his face from them, as one that is ashamed of them. If they begin to claim an acquaintance with him, and to plead the services they have rendered him, he will frown upon them, and, with a look of indignation and abhorrence, disclaim all knowledge of them^d. He will drive them from his presence, as unworthy of his favour, or of the company of his faithful people. And, oh! who can conceive the anguish which these contemptuous sinners must endure; when the Saviour of the world shall thus retaliate upon them the treatment which he has received at their hands?]

This, I say, is the recompence which *they must expect* from him—

[He has plainly forewarned them respecting this; and therefore it shall come to pass. But, that they may see how just this doom will be, let them only consider *the folly and wickedness* of their conduct.

What *folly* is it to turn their back on Christ, through fear of a contemptuous look, or a reproachful name! What madness to “fear them who can only kill the body, rather than Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell!” Does not such conduct render them contemptible, and justly subject them to the sentence with which they are threatened?

What desperate *wickedness* too is it to be ashamed of him who is the only beloved of the Father, and the object of incessant adoration to all the hosts of heaven! What horrible impiety, to pour contempt on him who left his glory for them;
who

^d Matt. vii. 22, 23.

who for their sakes "hid not his face from shame and spitting;" yea, "who, for the joy of saving their souls alive, endured the cross and despised the shame," and "became obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the cross!" Let them only contemplate his kindness towards them, and then consider whether the punishment of their ingratitude exceed the quality of their offence.]

INFER,

1. How necessary is courage to those who embrace the Gospel!

[It is not possible to be faithful unto Christ, and at the same time escape the censures of the world^e. And our only alternative is, to "be faithful unto death," or to relinquish all hope of his favour. The fearful and unbelieving will take their portion together in the lake of fire and brimstone^f. O beg of God to endue your souls with courage, that you may "set your faces like a flint" against the whole ungodly world, and maintain your stedfastness even to the end.]

2. How desirable is it to be looking forward to the future judgment!

[If we attend only to the concerns of this life, we shall be anxious to preserve our reputation in the world. But if we consider how soon an unerring judgment will be passed upon us, we shall not regard the calumnies that are circulated respecting us, or the contempt that is poured upon us. This was St. Paul's experience^g; and similar considerations will produce similar benefit to our souls.]

3. How important is it to have just views of Christ!

[The more enlarged our apprehension is of his excellency and glory, the more shall we be emboldened to confess him before men. St. Paul endured more for him than any other disciple ever did: yet neither reproach nor suffering could move him. And whence was it that he was thus immoveable? He himself tells us; "I am not ashamed; for I know in whom I have believed." Thus let us get a full persuasion of his power and faithfulness to support us under our tribulations, and reward us for them, and we shall not fear the face of man. We shall rather glory that we are counted worthy to suffer for his sake, and that we are honoured to be thus conformed to his image.]

^e John xv. 18—20.

^g 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^f 2 Tim. ii. 12. Rev. xxi. 8.

^h 2 Tim. i. 12.

DCCXXX.

CHRIST BLESSES LITTLE CHILDREN.

Mark x. 13—16. *And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his Disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.*

IT is common with men to shew partiality to the failings of their friends, at the time that they are leaning rather to the side of severity in their judgment of others. But our blessed Lord shewed no favour to his Disciples in that respect; but was as observant of smaller errors in them, as of the more flagrant transgressions of his enemies. He ever proceeded upon that principle, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.” His Disciples had interposed to prevent him from being troubled with a multitude of children, whom their fond parents foolishly, as the Disciples thought, were bringing to him: but he was very angry with them, and gave them a severe rebuke: for however they might take credit to themselves for meaning well, their conduct in this matter was highly reprehensible.

The text presents two things to our view;

I. His rebuke to them—

Some parents were bringing their children to Christ—

[To this they had probably been induced by the discourse which had recently passed between our Lord and his Disciples. On their inquiring, Who should be the greatest in his kingdom? he had set a little child before them, and declared that a conformity to it in humility constituted the most exalted character of his subjects; and that whosoever should receive one such little child in his name, would receive him; whilst those who should offend one, would involve himself in the
most

most tremendous guilt and misery^a. Hence it would naturally be supposed that Jesus had a peculiar love for little children; and that as he required others to receive them, he himself would certainly receive, and bless them too. Hence many believing parents sought to avail themselves of the opportunity of obtaining a blessing for their children; and brought them to him, that he might “put his hands upon them and bless them.” It was not *bodily*, but *spiritual*, health, which the parents sought for their children: and we cannot but highly applaud their zeal in such a cause.]

But the Disciples interposed to prevent it—

[They doubtless thought that they were doing right, in not suffering their Lord to be so troubled. His *time*, they thought, was too *precious* to be so occupied; his *work* too *important* to be so interrupted; his *engagements* too *numerous* to admit of such intrusions; his *fatigues* too *great* to be so needlessly increased. Besides, *to the children*, they supposed, it could be, of *little use*; and *to the parents*, only a *momentary gratification*: and if the *precedent* were once admitted, it *would be followed to an unknown extent*. Hence they would not suffer their Lord to be so distracted.

But, whilst they imagined that their conduct was precisely such as it ought to be, they were really acting a very unbecoming part. It is not every one who *means* well, that *acts* well: there is “a zeal that is not according to knowledge;” and such was theirs on the present occasion. Their conduct was indeed very criminal in many respects: It argued *low thoughts of their Divine Master*, whose condescension they limited; whilst, in truth, it is infinite. It argued *an ignorance of his office*, which is peculiarly designated by the prophet, as that of “a Shepherd, who carries the lambs in his bosom^b.” It argued *an unmindfulness of the Father’s grace*, who had promised, in a peculiar manner, to pour out his Spirit upon his people’s seed, and his blessing upon their offspring^c. It argued *unkindness to the parents*, whose feelings they should have more affectionately consulted; and *indifference to the children*, whose benefit they should have been studious to promote. It argued also *an unbelief of its efficacy*: they had often seen people obtaining health to their bodies by a mere touch of their Master’s garment, and yet they could not conceive that any benefit should accrue to the children’s souls by an authoritative imposition of his hands, and an immediate communication of his blessing. All this was exceedingly sinful. But they erred also in *the manner*,

as

^a Matt. xviii. 1—6.

^b Isai. xl. 11.

^c Isai. xlv. 3, 4. compared with Acts ii. 39.

as well as in *the matter*, of their conduct; for they "*rebuked*" these pious women. Alas! even good men, if unseasonably interrupted, are but too apt to shew an unhallowed temper, instead of exercising that meekness and gentleness which become their profession.]

Our Lord, however, deservedly and severely rebuked them—

[In St. Matthew's account there is a little change in the collocation of the words, which makes his address to them more emphatical^d; "Let the little children alone, and hinder them not from coming to me." But our Lord assigns as the reason of this reproof, (for he never would administer reproof without evincing the justice of it,) that "of such persons was the kingdom of God;" of *such in age*, and of *such in character*. Some confine this expression to *the character* of the persons who compose his kingdom: but, in so doing, they destroy all the force of his reasoning. If our Lord had meant only to say, that children were fit *emblems* of his subjects, it would have been no reason for his reproof; since they would be neither more so by being brought to him, nor less so by being kept away. But, if we understand that children are still, as under the Jewish dispensation, to be regarded as in covenant with God, and subjects of his kingdom, then the reason is clear and strong: for to keep children from him, would be to deprive them of privileges to which they were as much entitled as adults. Our Church lays peculiar stress upon this point in her Baptismal Service^e; and shews with great clearness, that it is a complete justification of those who maintain the propriety of *infant baptism*: for, if infants are capable of receiving Christ's blessing, are we not to bring them to him that they may obtain it? If they are capable of receiving *the thing signified*, are they not fit subjects to receive *the sign*? And if Christ was so angry with his Disciples for keeping them from him, can he be pleased with us, if we keep them from him? In a word, Christ has shewn us, by this act, that children are as much the subjects of his kingdom now, as ever they were under the Jewish dispensation; and every member of our Church has reason to rejoice, that the sentiments of our Reformers on this disputed subject were in such perfect unison with the word of God.

If it be objected, that Christ did not baptize the children; we answer, His baptism was not yet instituted; the only baptism that was now observed, was that of John. The question is, Are children to be regarded as subjects of Christ's kingdom?
and

^d Matt. xix 14.

^e See the Address to the parents, after the passage recording St. Mark's words in the Baptismal service.

and are they entitled to the privileges of that kingdom? Christ expressly says, They are: and so say *we*: and therefore according to his command we bring them to him, that they may be admitted to a participation of those blessings, precisely as the Jews by God's command brought their children to be admitted into covenant with him.]

In perfect agreement with these sentiments is,

II. His instruction to us—

Our Lord uniformly engrafted some general instruction on the passing occurrences of every day. He here instructs us,

1. By precept—

[Whilst children are to be received into the Church of Christ, they are to be regarded also as emblems of those moral qualities, which all the subjects of his kingdom must possess. There is in children a simplicity of mind, a teachableness of spirit, a consciousness of weakness, a dependence on their parents' care, an obedience to their commands, and a submission to their will. Now these must be the dispositions of all who would be numbered with Christ's people here, or be partakers with them in a better world: nor can any thing but a resemblance to children in these respects warrant any person to believe himself in a state of favour with God. The declaration in our text is as strong and clear as words can make it. The very entrance into Christ's kingdom is by this door: it is low, and we must stoop; it is narrow, and we must be little in our own estimation, before we can by any means find admission within it: there is no space allowed for the cumbrous ornaments of worldly wisdom, of moral goodness, of human power; we must enter naked and divested of them all—divested, I mean, in our own apprehension and conceit; and must be willing to take "Christ as our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and redemption." This is humiliating, it is true; but it must be done; and, if we will not submit to it, we can never enter into the kingdom of heaven: "the wise must become fools," the pure polluted^g, the righteous guilty^h *in their own estimation*, before Christ can be valued, or his salvation desired. We say not that a person must *commit wickedness* in order to fit himself for Christ's kingdom; God forbid: but he must renounce every degree of self-conceit, self-dependence, self-seeking, and self-applause; and, "whatever he had which once he accounted gain, must now be considered by him as loss for Christ."

O that all were thus divested of self, and made willing to seek

^f 1 Cor. iv. 10. ^g Job ix. 20, 21, 30, 31.

^h Rom. iii. 19.

seek their all in Christ! Let parents condescend to learn from their little children what dispositions they themselves should cultivate towards their heavenly Father; and bear in mind, that their highest perfection is, to be brought to a willing and habitual resemblance to that instructive emblem.]

2. By example—

["He took the little children up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." What amazing condescension! *How amiable in itself*, so to notice those, who could be so little conscious of his love! *How conciliatory to the parents*, whose hearts were more open to impression from the kindness shewn to their offspring, than from any favour that could be conferred upon themselves! *How encouraging to the children*, whose parents would not fail to remind them often, that *they* had been thus highly honoured, to be embraced in the Saviour's bosom, and to receive his heavenly blessing! Methinks, this very circumstance would operate upon them through life to devote themselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart." In a word, *how edifying to all!* To *parents*, it shewed what their chief desire for their children should be, namely, to bring them to the knowledge of him, and to the enjoyment of his salvation. To *Ministers*, it spoke with peculiar emphasis, that they should attend to the lambs of their flock, and consider neither the meanest nor the weakest of the people as beneath their notice: however laborious their occupations might be, they should reserve some portion of their time for the instruction of babes. To *all his believing people* also, whether men or women, it shewed how acceptable a service they would perform, if they laboured to instruct the rising generation. If he himself did not overlook the existence of little faith, or "despise the day of small things," or disdain to sow what could not be reaped for many years, well may his people cultivate the same benevolence, and exert themselves according to their measure in the same glorious cause.]

From this subject we may see,

1. How thankful ought children to be to their instructors¹!

[To you who are instructed from Sabbath to Sabbath it appears, that the teaching you to read is the great object which your instructors have in view: but this is by no means the case: they desire to perform the same kind office for you, which the parents in our text performed for their children; they would bring you to Christ, that you may be received into his

¹ This is proper to be noticed especially where there are *Sunday Schools*.

his bosom, and be made partakers of his blessing. For this end they pray for you in secret, that God may render their labours effectual for your eternal good; and whilst they are instructing you, they often put up a silent prayer to Him who seeth the desire of their hearts; and they actually put you, as it were, into the Saviour's hands, saying, 'Lord, give thy blessing to this dear child!' Let me then intreat you to have the same end in view, and to seek for yourselves his blessing upon your souls.]

2. What reason have they to be ashamed who would keep men from Christ!

[The Disciples had some reason for discouraging the bringing of infants to Christ; but what reason have they who would deter grown persons from coming to him? Shall it be thought that there are few, if any, who would act so wicked a part? Alas! there are many: for, what is the tendency of that derision with which religion is treated, and of that opposition which is almost universally made to those who are zealous in its cause? Surely, if our Lord was "*much displeased*" with his Disciples, who really meant well, it is no little displeasure that he will manifest against the wilful dispisers of his Gospel — — — We commend to their attention a fore-cited passage†, and pray God that they may never know the force of it by their own experience.]

3. What encouragement have we all to apply to Christ for ourselves!

[If our blessed Lord was so condescending unto infants, what will he not be to those who come to him with understanding hearts? Will he put any obstacles in *their* way? Has he not said, that "those who come unto him he will in no wise cast out?" Let not any then dishonour him by doubts and fears, as though he would not be gracious unto them: let not any sense of their own unworthiness discourage them: but let them rather remember, that the more lowly they are in their own eyes, the more amiable they will be in his; and the more empty they are in themselves, the more certainly shall they be "filled out of his fulness."]

† Matt. xviii, 6.

DCCXXXI.

THE RICH YOUTH FORSAKING CHRIST.

Mark x. 21, 22. *And Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou*

thou hast, and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

IT is never known what a man is, till he is tried. Those who most dread a conflict, may approve themselves stedfast when once they are actually engaged in it; and those who are most confident of their own prowess, may betray the greatest timidity. The eagerness of Peter to walk upon the waves, and his vehement protestations of fidelity to his Master, might have gained him a reputation for invincible firmness, had he not been left to prove by actual experiment the weakness and inefficacy of his resolutions. The man who engaged to follow Jesus whithersoever he might go, began to waver, as soon as he was informed that Jesus had not a place where to lay his head. Thus the young man in our text might have passed for the most excellent of characters, had he not been brought to the touchstone, and suffered to manifest the real dispositions of his soul. But the command which Jesus gave him, was a trial which he could not stand, and an ordeal which he could not pass. In elucidating his conduct, we shall consider,

I. The injunction given him—

[We confess that the command was *difficult* to be obeyed. If we contemplate his youth, his rank (a Ruler), his opulence; if we contemplate the sentiments he must have imbibed, the hopes he must have entertained, the habits he must have formed, the change proposed to him must have been irksome and arduous in the extreme. To exchange wealth for poverty, ease for trouble, homage for contempt, *this* was hard indeed for flesh and blood; nor could any thing but almighty Grace qualify him for such a work.

Yet, though difficult, the command was *not unreasonable*. From whom had he received his wealth; or who, but God, had made him to differ? And had not God a right to recall what he had only *lent*? Had he any cause to complain, if God, who for a time had elevated him above his fellow-creatures, should afterwards reduce him to a level with them? Had not God as much right to disperse his wealth among the poor, as he before had to accumulate it upon one single man? Besides, when the sacrifice, which he was called to make, would contribute so much to the comfort of his fellow-creatures;
and

and when it would ultimately return with a rich and abundant recompence into his own bosom; was it to be deemed unreasonable? Is it not what every merchant in the universe is glad to do, to sacrifice the temporary possession of his treasure, in the hope and prospect of far richer treasures in return?

Nor was it *singular*. This youth gloried in being a descendant of Abraham, who was called out from his country and kindred, to go, he knew not whither; to subsist, he knew not how. With this fact he was well acquainted; and he knew that Abraham never found reason to repent of his self-denying obedience. Moreover, he had at this moment before his eyes persons who had obeyed a similar call, and who could say, "Lo we *have left* all, and followed thee." And, in fact, though we are not all called to precisely the same *act* of obedience, we are all called to manifest that *spirit*, which would insure the performance of that act, if in the course of Providence we were called to it. Thus also, *in the latter part of the injunction*, there was nothing unreasonable, or singular. He came to our Lord for instruction; and our Lord bade him to become a stated attendant on his Ministry. He would, doubtless, in the execution of this duty, have a cross to bear: but had not all his disciples the same cross? and had not Jesus a far heavier cross than any, or than all together? yea, had he not come from heaven on purpose to bear it for them? was it unreasonable then that the disciple should be as the master, and the servant as his lord?

✦ If he was really desirous of obtaining salvation, there was nothing in the injunction given him, which did not deserve a cheerful and unreserved compliance.]

But we shall have still clearer views of this subject, if we consider,

II. The peculiar reasons for that injunction—

Our blessed Lord, in his reply to the young man, designed,

1. To discover to him the depravity of his own heart—

[Because the youth had never been guilty of any notorious breach of the commandments, he was ready to imagine that he had no ground for humiliation and contrition. Our Lord, if he had pleased, might have opened to him the spirituality of the law; and have shewn him that he was mistaken in supposing that he had "kept all the commandments from his youth up:" but he took a shorter and more convincing method: he gave him a specific charge, to obey which was his

his indispensable duty: by his reluctance to obey that, our Lord shewed him, that his heart was not so much in unison with the law of God as he imagined; yea, that if duty and interest should stand in competition with each other, *he* would prove as great a rebel as more flagrant transgressors.

Thus our Lord sought to counteract his pride and self-complacency; by leading him to manifest the worldliness and carnality of his heart.]

2. To wean him from self-confidence and self-dependence—

[By that question which the young man so confidently asked, "What lack I yet?" we are led to suspect, that, as he saw no defects in his obedience, so he saw no ground to doubt his acceptance with God *on account of* his obedience. The drift of his original question, "What shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" seems to have been to this effect: 'Master, I perceive that thou art a Teacher sent from God, and that thou requirest of us something different from what I have been accustomed to hear or practise: be so kind therefore as to inform me what it is; for I would not willingly omit any thing, whereby I may secure the salvation of my soul.' In this view of his question, he wanted to substantiate more fully, and establish more firmly, his claim to eternal life on the footing of his own obedience. Against this fatal error our Lord's injunction was strongly directed: it was an axe laid to the root of his self-righteousness: and it had a most powerful tendency, to convince the youth, that all his hopes were built on a foundation of sand.]

3. To lead him to the salvation provided for him in the Gospel—

[Our Lord might have preached the Gospel to him more fully, and informed him, that salvation was to be obtained only by faith in *him*, as "the way, the truth, and the life." But the time was not yet arrived for the full disclosure of Gospel truth. It was at present but sparingly promulgated. Besides, if our Lord had thus plainly declared the way of salvation, there is reason to think, that the young man would either have rejected the truth without further inquiry, or embraced it without a due preparation of soul for it; in either of which cases he would miss the end which he was solicitous to attain. The best way therefore to lead him to salvation, was, to shew him his need of it; that so he might enter upon a profession of it with all the zeal and gratitude that would be necessary for his establishment in the faith.]

But, while we thus vindicate the injunction given him, we cannot but lament,

III. The effect it produced upon him—

Instead of operating in the manner that our Saviour wished,

1. It filled him with grief—

["He was sad at that saying." But what made him "sad?" Was he grieved and ashamed on account of his backwardness to obey it? That would have been a hopeful sign, and would probably have issued in his conversion to God. But, alas! he was grieved at the strictness of the precept. "He had great possessions," and could not prevail upon himself to part with them. His riches were his idol; and of more estimation, in his eyes, than any treasure in heaven. Had he been called to sacrifice *a part* of his property, he would probably have acquiesced in the appointment: but to bereave himself of *all*, to reduce himself to a state of poverty, *this* was a requisition which he could not comply with.

Such is the effect of the Gospel upon many at this time: they would gladly embrace it, and would make some sacrifices to obtain its blessings: but to renounce the world, to mortify their lusts, to turn their backs upon all that is pleasing to flesh and blood, and to bring upon themselves nothing but contempt and persecution from their dearest friends and relatives, appears to them too great a sacrifice, and they hope to get to heaven upon easier terms. Thus between a sense of their duty, and an aversion to perform it, the only effect of the Gospel is to render them unhappy.]

2. It determined him to forsake Christ altogether—

["He went away grieved." Much as he revered the Lord Jesus, and wished to partake of his salvation, he could not continue with him on such terms as these. The price was too great for him to pay; and therefore he turned his back upon him.

Unhappy youth! How much better had it been for him, if he had been born in a low estate! What a curse to him were his riches, which stood between him and the Saviour of the world! Who is not ready to weep over him, when he reflects upon the fatal effects of that decision? Who that sees that hopeful character turning his back upon his Divine Instructor, giving up all hopes of heaven, and determinately preferring a present portion, does not tremble, lest he himself should be left to make the same foolish choice?]

INFER,

1. How dangerous is the state of many, who yet think themselves safe!

[If we had seen that youth (regardless of the follies which persons

persons of his age and condition too generally prosecute) coming in so respectful a manner to the despised Nazarene; "kneeling before him" with profoundest reverence; addressing him in such terms, and such an emphatic way, as to intimate that he thought Jesus to be more than human; if we had seen him declaring confidently, that, to the best of his knowledge, he had persevered in an uniform obedience to all the commandments, and was ready to fulfil any duty that could be pointed out to him; above all, if we had seen Jesus himself struck with his amiable deportment, and "loving him" for his excellent qualities; who amongst us would not have been disposed to envy that youth his prospects of immortality and glory? Yet, behold, he came short of heaven! There was "*one thing he lacked*;" and for that one thing (as far as we are informed) he perished for ever. O that the moral, the sober, the amiable (of both sexes); would consider this, and take warning from his example! The thing he lacked, was, a determination to forsake all for Christ. And is not this lacking in many amongst ourselves? Are there not many, whom, for their amiable qualities, one cannot but love, who yet, if they must part with *all*, or *Christ*, would hold fast their present portion? O, Beloved, let this matter be duly weighed; and never imagine that you are in the way to heaven, till you can "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus."]

2. How awful is the condition of those who have no concern for their souls!

[Multitudes there are, in this and every other place, whose lives have been far from moral; who, instead of having kept all the commandments from their earliest infancy, have violated them in many flagrant instances; and who never came to Jesus with an unfeigned desire to receive instruction about the way to heaven. What then must be *their* state? We appeal to themselves, If this amiable youth was not saved, how can you imagine that salvation belongs to you, who have not done half so much for it as this perishing youth? Methinks, this one example speaks more forcibly to you than ten thousand arguments. You must be wilfully blind, if you do not see how deplorable is your condition, and how certain your ruin, if you continue in your present state. Be persuaded, that it is not so easy a matter to get to heaven. You must have a real concern about your souls: the attainment of heaven must be paramount to every other consideration. If you will gain heaven at all, you must "take it by the holy violence" of prayer and faith.]

3. How blessed are they whose hearts are right with God!

[They

[They may indeed be exercised with great trials: they may be called to relinquish much of their worldly interests; to suffer much reproach; and to bear many a heavy cross. But the "heavenly treasure" will richly repay for all: yea, the very prospect of it is a sufficient compensation for all that we can endure. Could we but consult this unhappy youth, and ask him what he *now* thinks of his past conduct, how would he condemn his conduct, how would he deplore his folly! If, on the contrary, we could ask of Paul what views he now had of his conduct in "suffering the loss of all things" for Christ's sake; would he not confirm his former declarations? would he not affirm more strongly than ever, that all things were dung and dross in comparison of Christ? Let us then take joyfully the loss of man's esteem, and the spoiling of our goods: let the views and prospects of glory cheer us when dejected, and animate us when faint. We have reason to expect, that "the more our afflictions abound for Christ's sake, the more our consolations also shall abound through Christ:" and we are sure, that, "if we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified together."]

*** If the Sermon on the three following verses be not preached in connexion with this, the third inference should be, *How little to be desired are great riches!* This is the reflection which our Lord himself makes upon it; and therefore it would be very improper to omit it here, except with a view to a fuller and distinct consideration of that subject.

DCCXXXII.

THE DANGER OF RICHES.

Mark x. 23—25. *And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his Disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the Disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

IN the perusal of history, it is desirable not merely to treasure up facts in our minds, but to deduce from them such observations as shall increase our stock of practical and useful knowledge. It will be to little purpose to have our memory stored with events, unless our judgment be matured by suitable reflections

reflections upon them. In reference to the Sacred History, this remark is still more obvious and important. Very little benefit would accrue to a person from knowing, that a rich young man had turned away from Christ, because he disliked the directions which our Lord had given him. If we would derive any material instruction from this event, we should consider what aspect it has upon the manners of men in general: we should, after the example which our Lord himself has set us, contemplate the effects which wealth generally produces on those who possess it, and the obstacles which it lays in our way to the kingdom of heaven.

In confirmation of our Lord's reflection, we shall endeavour to shew, whence it is that "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

I. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and not to *love* them—

Riches almost universally fascinate the minds of men—

[Persons of opulence see what respect their wealth procures for them; that they are objects of admiration and envy to all around them; and that, by means of their money, they can obtain all the comforts and luxuries of life. Hence they are ready to conceive that riches are really good, and almost necessarily conducive to the happiness of those who possess them. Under this idea, their affections are easily attracted towards them, and they are ready to congratulate themselves on their own peculiarly favoured lot. Hence that caution of the Psalmist's, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them."]

But, in proportion as they engage our hearts, they obstruct our way to heaven—

[We are commanded "not to set our affections on things below, but on things above." This prohibition extends to riches, and to every thing else that fascinates the carnal mind. The reason of it is moreover assigned by God himself, namely, that the love of this world neither proceeds from him, nor leads to him, but is absolutely incompatible with real love to him. Let it only then be acknowledged, that the love of God is necessary to the attainment or enjoyment of heaven; and then it will follow, that the person, who loves his riches, cannot

cannot attain heaven; nor could he enjoy it, even if he were admitted there: he has in his bosom an object that rivals God: and God is a jealous God, who will never accept a divided heart. "We never can serve God and Mammon." If "our treasure be on earth, our heart will be there also:" and if it be looked to as the source of our happiness, "Woe unto us; for we have received our consolation."]

II. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and not *be puffed up by them*—

Pride is too generally an attendant on riches—

[As great respect is paid to riches, the people who possess them are apt to think that they deserve it. They arrogate it to themselves; they are offended, if any persons refuse to gratify them with the homage which they claim. They shew in their look, their dress, their manner of speaking, yea, in their very gait, that they "think themselves to be somebody." They expect their wishes to be consulted, and their judgment to be followed. They are impatient of contradiction. They do not like, either in public or in private, to be told of their faults. If a Minister deal faithfully with their consciences, they rather condemn *him* for (what they will call) his rudeness or harshness, than *themselves* for their departure from God. How commonly this disposition springs from riches, we may judge from that direction which is given to Ministers; "Charge them who are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded".]

And this also, if indulged, will exclude us from heaven—

["Pride was not made for man:" "The proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord:" whoever he be, "God will certainly abase him." Not Hezekiah himself shall escape without deep humiliation^c; nor even then, without severe chastisements^d. If we be "lifted up with pride, (whatever be the occasion,) we shall fall into the condemnation of the devil." The characteristic mark of every true Christian, and of all that shall be admitted into heaven, is humility; "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Worldly poverty is not more opposite to wealth, than spiritual poverty is to pride. The true Christian will "prefer others in honour before himself," and account himself "less than the least of all saints." But, inasmuch as wealth has a directly opposite tendency, it is hostile to the interests of Christianity, and to the salvation of all who possess it.]

3. It

^b 1 Tim. vi. 17.

^d Isai. xxxix. 4—7.

^c 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26.

III. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and *not be corrupted by them*—

Whatever a corrupt heart can desire, is attainable through riches—

[Wealth opens a way for all manner of sensuality and self-indulgence: and, at the same time that it gives us facilities for gratifying our evil inclinations, it leads us into such habits as greatly dispose us to sin. A luxurious table draws us to intemperance; intemperance inflames our passions; and affluence opens an easy way to the indulgence of them. The rich even think that they are, in a measure, licensed to commit iniquity: and, in their eyes, intemperance and lewdness are, at the most, no more than venial follies, which they can commit without shame, and look back upon without remorse.

But where riches do not produce this effect, they still exceedingly corrupt the soul. They habituate us to easy indolent habits, that are very contrary to those self-denying exercises in which the Christian should be employed. They lead us into the company of those whose minds are least spiritual, and from whose conversation and example we can derive least profit. They induce parents to seek connexions for their children rather among the opulent than among the good. They not unfrequently draw persons into great speculations, which fill them with anxiety, and encumber them with oppressive cares. Strange as it may seem, they often prove incentives to avarice, as well as to prodigality; and to an oppression of others, as well as to the gratifying of ourselves. Hence, whenever the term “lucre” is mentioned in the New Testament, the term “filthy” is invariably associated with it.]

And the more our corruptions are indulged, the more certain we are of perishing in final ruin—

[We are warned, that “to be carnally-minded is death:” and the final ruin of a very large portion of those who hear the Gospel is ascribed to “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, which choke the word that they hear, and render it unfruitful.” “The love of money,” we are told, “is the root of all evil;” and “they who even desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Inasmuch as riches induce us principally to mind earthly things, they make us enemies of the cross of Christ, and bring us to destruction as our end.”]

IV. It is difficult to have riches, and *not trust in them*—

Wealth,

Wealth, whilst it gains our affections, is apt to become also a ground of our confidence—

["The rich man's wealth," says Solomon, "is his strong city." We are apt to rely upon it, as a source both of present and future happiness. We seem, when possessed of riches, to be out of the reach of harm. When poor, we more habitually and more sensibly feel our dependence on Providence; but, when rich, we think we have no need of religion to make us happy, or of God to provide for us: we are ready to say, like the rich man in the Gospel, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." In like manner, we think that we have no reason to fear about the future world. We are ready to imagine, that God will pay the same deference to wealth as our fellow-creatures do. We have no conception that a rich man, unless he has been guilty of some peculiarly enormous crimes, can be cast into hell. It is in vain that we read of "the rich man lifting up his eyes in torments:" we take for granted, that a rich man, if he have been tolerably decent in his deportment, must of necessity go to heaven: and a rich man will not endure, for the most part, to have a doubt of his future happiness suggested to him. It is not without reason, therefore, that St. Paul says, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they trust not in uncertain riches."]

But to place our confidence in any thing but God, is certain ruin—

[God denounces a "curse on those who make flesh their arm;" and he represents their conduct as "a departure of their hearts from him." And Job informs us, that "the saying to the gold, Thou art my confidence, is an iniquity to be punished by the Judge, and a denial of the God that is above."]

V. It is difficult to have riches, and not *cleave to them in preference to Christ*—

This is the point more especially referred to in the text itself—

[The reason assigned for the young man's forsaking Christ was, that he had great possessions: and hence our Lord's reflection on the almost insurmountable difficulties which riches interpose in our way to heaven. The fact is, that, though every one is not called to renounce his riches precisely in the same way that this opulent Ruler was, every one is required to sit loose to them, and to be willing to renounce them all, whenever they shall stand in competition with his duty to God. And there is no man, who is not called to make some sacrifices

sacrifices for Christ. Now a rich man's reputation is exceedingly dear to him; and his interests in the world appear to him of almost incalculable importance: and, if he be called to renounce them all, the sacrifice appears too great to be endured. He hopes he shall find out an easier way to heaven; and chooses rather to risk the salvation of his soul, than to subject himself to such grievous trials in order to obtain it. Even those who have tasted somewhat of the sweetness of religion are sometimes drawn away, like Demas; and forsake their Saviour from love to this present world.]

But in choosing our portion now, we choose for eternity—

“We must reap according to what we sow: he that soweth to the flesh must, of the flesh, reap corruption.” We must “part with all, if we would have the pearl of great price.” “If we do not forsake all for Christ, we cannot be his disciples.” “We must count all things but loss for him.” “We must hate father and mother, and houses and lands, yea and our lives also, for his sake.” “If we will not lose our lives for him here, we never can find life in the eternal world.”]

INFER,

1. How little true faith is there in the world!

[Where is the man, who, if offered great riches; would be afraid to accept them, lest they should impede his way to heaven? or, when congratulated on his attainment of wealth, would damp the ardour of his friends by intreating rather an interest in their prayers, that the newly-acquired riches might not corrupt and destroy his soul? Where is the man possessed of riches, who does not think his way to heaven as easy as that of any other person? In short, where is the person who does not say in his heart, “Give me riches: I will run the risk of their doing me any harm: I have no doubt I shall get to heaven with them, as easily as without them?” But would it be thus, if we really believed the words of our blessed Lord? Alas! even the Apostles themselves scarcely knew how to receive so hard a saying: we are told, that they were “astonished out of measure.” But it becomes us to credit the assertion of Him who could not err, and would not deceive.]

2. What reason have the poor to be satisfied with their lot!

[If rich men have the advantage of them with respect to this world, the poor have incomparably better prospects with respect to the world to come. These are free and unincumbered, and ready, as it were, to run the race that is set before them;

them; while the others are impeded by their lusts as with flowing garments, and have their "feet laden with thick clay." These in multitudes flock to heaven, "as doves to their windows," whilst very few of the others ever attain the heavenly prize. It must not however be imagined that the poor will be saved, *because* they are poor; any more than the rich will perish, *because* they are rich. All must run, if they would obtain the prize. He who regards the salvation of his soul as "the one thing needful," shall be saved, whether rich or poor; and he who does not, will perish. Neither the riches of the one, nor the poverty of the other, will avail him any thing. The only inquiry will be, Who among them was "rich towards God?" and their several attainments in real piety will be the only ground of distinction between them. Yet, inasmuch as a state of poverty renders us less exposed to temptation than wealth, it may well be endured with patience, and improved with gratitude. Even if we have (through misfortunes of any kind) experienced a transition from wealth to poverty, we may well be reconciled to the change (however painful it may be to flesh and blood); since the loss we sustain may be in fact our greatest advantage: we have lost perhaps the lading of the ship, which, if suffered to continue on board, would utterly have sunk the ship.]

3. How thankful should we be that "help is laid on One that is mighty!"

[When the Apostles exclaimed, "Who then can be saved?" they were consoled with the declaration, that "all things were possible with God." Now this is our comfort, that all fulness is treasured up for us in Christ; and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." None then need despair: however great our temptations may be, "He knoweth how to deliver the godly out of them," and to "preserve them blameless unto his heavenly kingdom." He can uphold a Joseph, a David, and a Daniel, amidst all the splendour of courts, as well as under the pressure of the heaviest trials. Let all then put their trust in Jesus, even in that almighty Saviour, whose grace is sufficient for them, and through whose strengthening communications they shall be able to do all things: so shall Abraham the rich and prosperous, and Lazarus the poor and indigent, rejoice together in God's kingdom for ever and ever.]

DCCXXXIII.

THE REWARD OF THOSE WHO SUFFER FOR CHRIST.

Mark x. 28—30. *Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life.*

THROUGH the corruption of our nature, the defects of others are apt to raise us in our own estimation, and to afford us occasion for self-applause. This ought not to be: for the faults of others should be lamented, no less than our own, because they are injurious to the souls of men: and, if we ourselves are free from those faults, we have reason to glorify God for his grace, which alone has made us to differ from others. We have in the context a lamentable instance of human weakness; a young man, of exemplary habits, who, on being required to sell all that he had, and to give it to the poor, and follow Christ, went away sorrowful; grieved to part with Christ, but preferring his wealth before him. Peter beholding this, began to reflect with complacency on the different conduct which he, and his fellow-Apostles, had pursued: they had left all for Christ; and, as our Lord had told the young man, that he, if he complied with his counsel, should “have treasure in heaven,” Peter asked, What recompence should be made to him and his brethren for the sacrifices which they had made in the cause of Christ; “We have forsaken all, and followed thee: what shall *we* have therefore?”

THIS INQUIRY is the first thing for our present consideration—

[Though the Apostles were poor, their ALL was as much to them, as it would have been if they had been richer: nor can we doubt, but that the surrender of it was as acceptable to God, as if the sacrifice had been more costly: “it is accepted

* See Matt. xix. 27.

accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not^b." This sacrifice was required of them, and they had offered it without hesitation: they could truly say, they "had left all for Christ;" and they had thereby approved themselves worthy of their descent from him, who, at God's command, had offered his only son Isaac upon the altar. Nor are we to imagine that the duty was peculiar to *them*: it is as much our duty, as it was theirs, to leave all for Christ. We are not indeed called, like the Apostles, to forsake our worldly callings in order to wait as stated attendants on our Lord; we are rather to "abide in our callings wherein we are called:" but we must *be willing* to sacrifice every thing for Christ, and must *actually* sacrifice every thing that stands in competition with him: in this respect the whole Christian world are called to the same exercise of faith and self-denial as the Apostles were; every thing sinful must be mortified; and even the most innocent and necessary things must be given up, rather than that we should be drawn by them to the commission of any one sin, or to the neglect of any one duty: we must "*hate* father and mother, and even our own lives also, in comparison of Christ^c."

Under such circumstances Peter's inquiry seems not unreasonable: for if we are to surrender up every thing to and for Christ, we may well ask, What shall I gain by this? or, What recompence shall I obtain? It is not to be expected that God will call us to such trials, and not remunerate us for our fidelity to him. It is true, we can never look for a reward *of debt*; but a reward *of grace* we may expect, and *that* too in proportion to the sacrifices we make, the sufferings we endure, and the services we perform. We are not at liberty to make bargains, as it were, with the Almighty, and to stipulate for so much wages in return for so much service: we must rather enter voluntarily into his service, and cheerfully give up all for him: but *after having made the needful sacrifices*, we may inquire into the promised recompence of reward. We must, like Abraham, "go out from our country and our kindred, not knowing whither we go^d;" and must trust in God to make all necessary provision for us: and, if he had not specified any thing in his word, we should be contented to continue ignorant of the recompence that he will assign us: but, as he has been pleased to make specific promises to those who trust in him, we cannot do wrong in endeavouring to ascertain their import and extent.]

THE ANSWER OF OUR LORD to this inquiry is the next point to be noticed by us—

[St. Matthew records more of our Lord's answer than either

^b 2 Cor. viii. 12.

^c Luke xiv. 26.

^d Heb. xi. 8.

either of the other Evangelists. He mentions a part which seems more immediately applicable to the Apostles themselves, who, "*in the regeneration*," that is, in the day when "God will make all things new," and "there shall be new heavens and a new earth," and "when our Lord shall come in his glory to judge the world," shall be honoured above all other men, being, as it were, assessors with Christ in the Judgment, and having their word as the law by which "the twelve tribes of Israel," and the whole world, shall be judged: St. Mark records that only which was of general use; but still he gives all the satisfaction that the most bereaved and destitute person can desire.

There is a *present* recompence which all who suffer loss for Christ shall receive; and *that* too exceedingly beyond any loss they can possibly sustain. It is taken for granted that they may lose the affection of all their most endeared relatives for their attachment to the Gospel; and that they may be deprived of all that they possess in the world: but God will often send them such supplies in another way, that they shall in reality sustain no loss at all: but, if he does not recompense them in this way, he will give them "*contentment*," which with godliness is great gain;" and such an *increased enjoyment* of their slender pittance, as shall be far sweeter than all the delicacies upon earth. He will "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and, under the loss of earthly parents, and an earthly portion, will enable them to call *him*, Father, and to view heaven itself as their inheritance. Let any one who has experienced these consolations, say, Whether they be not "*an hundred-fold*" greater than all that they ever derived from the possession of earthly comforts even in their richest abundance? — — —

But, besides this, there is a *future* recompence, even "*eternal life*," which shall assuredly be given to all who suffer for Christ in this world: "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him," and "be glorified together," and have "a weight of glory proportioned" to the trials we endure, and to the graces which we exercise, in his service. But who can estimate the value of *that* recompence? — — — Suffice it to say, that the veracity of God is pledged for the bestowment of it, and that the blessedness conferred shall exist, as long as God himself exists.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who hesitate about leaving all for Christ—

[Does a moment's hesitation become you? Think of your Lord and Saviour: did he hesitate, when an offer was made him to redeem your souls? Did he account the conditions hard, when he had your everlasting salvation in view? No:

he

he gladly left the bosom of his Father, and assumed our nature, and bore our curse, that he might redeem our souls from death and hell'. Do you then hesitate to make any sacrifice for him? Look at Paul; was he intimidated? did he account any thing too much to do or suffer for his Lord? Look at Moses: can you be called to sacrifice more than he? "He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater than all the riches of Egypt^h." Think not to have an interest in Christ on any lower terms: You must, *in heart and affection*, forsake all, if you would be his disciplesⁱ. The Rich Youth in the Gospel would not accede to these terms: but do you commend him? Do you not look upon him with pity? Do you not think he would change his mind now, if the offer were again made him? O be wise in time! "buy the truth, and sell it not:" be willing to "sell all that you have for that treasure which is hid in the Gospel, and for that pearl of great price^k." If, like Amaziah, you reply, "What shall I do for all the talents I shall sacrifice?" I answer with the Prophet, "The Lord is able to give thee much more^l." In fact, your gain will exceed all calculation. If you were a merchant, you would gladly embrace an opportunity of making ten or twenty per cent. of your money, though the return should not be absolutely certain; but here you are promised *ten thousand per cent.* and it is assured to you by the veracity of God himself. Only "have faith in God," and all the blessings of "the upper and nether springs," of time and of eternity, are yours.]

2. Those who, like the Apostles, have left all for him—

[Whatever your losses or sufferings may have been, I congratulate you from my heart: yea, God himself congratulates you^m. And I confidently put the question to you, Has any one of you been ever disappointed of your hope? Have you ever been a loser by serving the Lord! Has he not made up to you in spiritual things, what you have sacrificed for him in worldly things? In the pursuit of earthly gratifications, you have often paid too dearly for your enjoyments; but have you ever had reason to regret the price you have paid for the maintenance of a good conscience, and for the benefits of the Gospel? After having counted the cost yourself, have you a friend in the world whom you would dissuade from treading in your steps? You still experience "persecutions;" for they are *a part of the Promise*, if I may so speak: but do you find them so great a drawback upon your happiness,

^g Compare Ps. xl. 6—8. with Phil. ii. 6—8.

^h Compare Acts xx. 24. & xxi. 13, with Phil. ii. 17. & iii. 7, 8.

ⁱ Heb. xi. 24—26.

^j Luke xiv. 33.

^k Matt. xiii. 44—46.

^l 2 Chron. xxv. 9.

^m Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Pet. iv. 12—14. Jam. i. 2—4, 12.

ness, as you once expected? Is an opprobrious name, or the loss of worldly interests, so great a matter as you once imagined? Shew then by your steadfastness, that, "in God's favour is life;" and that though "you have nothing else, you really possess all things." *To those who are preparing for the Ministry*, these thoughts are peculiarly important: for this discipline is often sent, in order to prepare you for the service of the sanctuary. You are to stand in the front of the battle: you are to be examples to the flock: and it is by such exercises that you are to be fitted for your work, and to bring down a blessing on your future labours". Still it is not of you only that these sacrifices are required; nor are you alone to receive the rich compensation that will be awarded for them: This duty is the duty of all; this happiness is the happiness of all: to all therefore without exception I would say, "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."]

ⁿ Deut. xxxiii. 9—11.

DCCXXXIV.

THE AMBITION OF JAMES AND JOHN REPROVED.

Mark x. 35—40. *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they say unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.*

THERE is a fund of instruction in the Scriptures, which the superficial reader entirely overlooks. A thousand little circumstances that are incidentally mentioned in them, serve to confirm each other for the establishment of our faith^a; whilst others, that are not mentioned at all, but only supplied by the attentive Reader, afford lessons of the greatest importance for the regulation of our conduct. To administer reproof well, is an art exceeding rare and difficult

^a This is beautifully illustrated in that masterly work, Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.

difficult to be attained. When called to attempt it, we in general either pass over the fault so slightly, as to convey no adequate idea of its malignity; or insist upon it so strongly, as to incense, rather than conciliate, the offending person: taking no notice of what we might approve, we are apt to look only at what we disapprove; and to search out occasion for blame, even beyond what the occasion requires. But, instead of this, we should be forward to applaud what is good in the spirit of any person, when we cannot commend the terms in which he speaks; or to put a favourable construction on the terms he uses, when we are constrained to shew our disapprobation of his spirit. Our Lord has set us an example in this respect, which well deserves our imitation. Two of his Disciples, James and John, had come to him with a request, which argued lamentable ignorance and a highly culpable ambition. But how did our Lord correct their folly? Did he expatiate upon their fault, and aggravate it to the uttermost? No: he apparently overlooked it; and annexed to their words a favourable meaning which they were never intended to convey; and then founded on them such instruction as was calculated silently and effectually to counteract the evils of their heart.

In speaking of the request which these Disciples offered to him, we shall notice it,

I. As it was intended by them—

Whether the idea originated with them or their mother, we do not know: Perhaps the Disciples, conscious of the unreasonableness of their desires, had engaged the good offices of their mother, to veil their own ambition: or, possibly, the mother, anxious for the aggrandisement of her family, had urged on her sons to unite in the request: but at all events it is evident, that they hoped by their joint influence certainly to prevail.

Notwithstanding all that our Lord had just said about his sufferings and death, his Disciples still expected that he would establish a temporal kingdom. Though he had spoken of his being crucified,

crucified, yet, as he had talked also of "rising again the third day," they conceived, that he spoke only of some transient trials, which would issue in a complete triumph over all his enemies. They remembered that promise which he had very recently given them, that they should at a future period "sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel^b;" and they concluded, that it must relate to some temporal dominion: emboldened by this, they presumed to ask that they might be invested with the two highest places of dignity and power in his kingdom. Not a thought did they bestow on his sufferings, though described in such awful terms: nothing found any place in their minds, but a hope of speedy elevation to the highest honours upon earth. Nor did they affect only a superiority over the world at large, but even above their own brethren also, even above all the other Apostles; so blind were they to their own incompetency for such a post, and so regardless of their own eternal interests. Consider their request in this view:

1. How unsuitable to their talents!

[What qualifications had they for such an office as that which they solicited? They might be experienced enough as fishermen; but what preparation of mind had they for Statesmen, and for the government of an extensive empire? Foolish and vain men! Well did our Saviour say to them, "Ye know not what ye ask."]

2. How repugnant to their best interests!

[They had been called from their wonted employment, in order that they might be at leisure to acquire spiritual knowledge; and would they go and undertake an employment that would fill them with ten thousand times greater cares, even if they were qualified to engage in it? Will a man about to run a race, "load his feet with thick clay?" Yet, notwithstanding their Lord had very recently told them, that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven^c," they sought after wealth and honour as the summit of their felicity. Alas! how awfully had Satan blinded their eyes, and deluded their hearts!]

3. How illustrative of the carnality of the human heart!

^b Matt. xix. 28.

^c ib. ver. 25, 26. [Though

[Though only two of the Disciples offered this request all the others shewed by their indignation that they were under the influence of the same ambition. And indeed what they expressed in words, is more or less the language of all our hearts. We would not perhaps *utter* the sentiment so plainly as they did; but we will *indulge* it. We long for some further advancement in life; somewhat more of honour, or power, or wealth. We do not indeed wish to govern kingdoms; because of that we have no prospect: but as soon as any elevation in the world appears to be within our reach, we instantly find a drawing of heart towards it: all, from the prince to the beggar, are thus affected: and even those, who profess themselves to be disciples of Christ, are still infected with this fatal malady, the love of this world: Yes, if the desire of our hearts were as plainly expressed as theirs was, we should be found, with very few exceptions, to resemble those infatuated and misguided men.]

Let us now proceed to notice their request,

II. As it was interpreted by our Lord—

He graciously overlooked the true construction of their words, and affixed a sense to them which they were capable of bearing, and which divested them of a great portion of the evil which they contained: and then he formed his answer, as suited to his own construction of them. He supposed the words to relate to that kingdom which he was really come to establish in the world; and as importing a desire after the highest proficiency in grace, and the highest elevation in glory. In conformity with this idea, he speaks to them only of *Spiritual advancement*, and shews them,

1. The way in which it was to be obtained—

[It is not by a bare request that any person can arrive at eminence in the Divine life. The soul is to be disciplined by conflicts, and to be purified by afflictions. Perfect as the Lord Jesus himself was, “he learned obedience by the things which he suffered,” and “was made perfect through sufferings:” and in like manner must all his people be — — — Hence he put the question to them, “Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” As though he had said, ‘You see what bitter trials I endure, that I am overwhelmed even with a sea of troubles^d;’ and it is ordained that all who will be distinguished either here, or in
heaven,

^d See 1 Cor. x. 2.

heaven, must arrive at that distinction by the same path : “ they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven,” and “ suffer with me here if they would be glorified with me in a better world.” This is a solemn and important truth : it has been verified in every age and corner of the world : from righteous Abel to this very hour, every saint has experienced it ; and those whose situations have required them to take the lead, have not only borne the brunt of the battle, but frequently have been called to sacrifice their very lives in the cause of Christ. Persecution is a cup which every saint must drink of ; and a baptism which every follower of Christ must expect to be baptized with.]

2. The way in which they themselves should obtain it—

[In answer to the question put to them by our Lord, the two Disciples, without any hesitation, affirmed, that they could suffer any extremity for him. But what presumption was this ! Still however our blessed Lord would not mark what they said amiss ; but, passing over it in silence, told them, that they should all partake of this honour, and be rendered conformable to his image. They had been chosen by him to be his messengers to the world, and to lead others in the way wherein they should go ; and therefore it was necessary that they in particular should be patterns of that faith and patience which they were to inculcate upon others. Accordingly, the very first of the Apostles that was put to death for the sake of Christ, was James* : and John was soon imprisoned and beaten for the Gospel sake^f ; and, after a life of many trials, was banished to the Isle of Patmos, where he speaks of himself, at the age of an hundred years old, as “ a companion in tribulation in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ^g. Thus he most effectually counteracted their ambitious views, by shewing them, that, instead of honours in this world, they must look for nothing but tribulations and persecutions even unto death.]

3. To what persons it should ultimately be given—

[In the last verse of our text, there are words inserted in *Italics* by our Translators, in order to supply what they supposed necessary to complete the sense ; but there was no occasion for that addition ; and, in fact, it obscures, instead of illustrating, the meaning of the passage. Our Lord tells his Disciples, that the chief places in his kingdom were to be disposed of by him, not according to his own mere arbitrary will, but agreeably to a plan concerted from all eternity between

* Acts xii. 2.

^f Acts v. 40.

^g Rev. i. 9.

between his Father and himself; and that they only would possess the highest place for whom that place had been prepared^a. His words however admit of two distinct meanings; they may be understood as declaring, that his gift of eternal life is *limited by the decrees of God*, or that it is *regulated by the attainments of men*. In either of these views, they contain important instruction. God the Father did, from all-eternity, enter into covenant with his Son, and give to him a people, whom he should redeem by his blood, and save by his effectual grace; and on whom he should confer everlasting happiness in heaven. Of these our blessed Lord frequently speaks as of persons given to him by the Father; and he plainly declares elsewhere, that his bestowing of eternal life was limited to them¹. But it is equally true, that the degrees of glory which shall be conferred on different persons will be proportioned to their attainments in grace: it is expressly said, that “every man shall receive according to his own labour^k.” Of course, there are higher degrees of glory prepared for those who labour and suffer much for their Lord, and lower degrees for those who are less diligent. The parables of the pounds and of the talents are decisive upon this point. In this sense of the words, our Lord’s reply appears to be more pertinent than in the other; for then the import of them will be to this effect: ‘Do not be looking for earthly honour, but for the honour that cometh of God; and be as ambitious for that as you will: only remember, that the degrees of it which you shall obtain, depend upon your own exertions for the attainment of it: engage heartily in my service, and expect assuredly at my hands a reward proportioned to your diligence and fidelity.’ This is an encouraging consideration to every one of us: the cup we may have to drink of may be bitter at the time; but it shall soon be exchanged for a far different cup, which we shall drink of to all eternity: and though we go through a sea of troubles now, our augmented weight of glory shall abundantly compensate for all the sorrows we have endured.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. What we are to *desire*—

[If we will hear a Prophet, he says, “Seekest thou great things unto thyself? seek them not¹.” If we will attend to an Apostle, he says, “Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth^m.” Let us attend to these instructions,

^a The word ἀλλὰ is used in the sense of *et μὴ*. Compare Mark ix. 8. with Matt. xvii. 8.

¹ John xvii. 2, 24.

^m Jer. xlv. 5.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 8.

ⁿ Col. iii. 2.

instructions, and "count all things but loss, that we may win Christ"— — —]

2. What we are to *expect*—

[If we look for honour and acceptance with man, we shall be disappointed. Which of the Prophets, which of the Apostles, was not an object of hatred and persecution to an ungodly world? Who are we then, that we should expect different treatment from them? Let us bear in mind, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution:" and let us be content to bear our cross, in order that we may hereafter receive a crown— — —]

3. What we are to *do*—

[God has appointed to every one of us our work: let us be diligent in the performance of it: "whatsoever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with all our might." But let us be especially careful of the rock which these presumptuous Disciples split upon. When our Lord asked them whether they could "drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism," they confidently answered that they could. And how justly they estimated their own powers, they soon shewed, when, upon our Lord's apprehension in the garden, they all forsook him and fled. Thus will it be with us, if we attempt to do any thing in our own strength: we shall soon find that "we have not of ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought," much less to do and suffer all the will of God. Our Lord tells us, that "without Him we can do nothing." Let us remember then, that, whilst we engage in his service, we must derive all our strength from him. If we look to him, we need not fear either men or devils: we may set at nought all the menaces of our most inveterate enemies: a fiery furnace, or a den of lions, need be no object of terror to us; for "our strength shall be according to our day;" and we shall be "enabled both to do all things," and "to suffer all things, through Christ who strengtheneth us."]

DCCXXXV.

LEGITIMATE AMBITION ILLUSTRATED.

Mark x. 41—45. *And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them unto him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your Minister; and whosoever of you will*
be

be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

THE corruption of the heart, like fire in flint, generally lies concealed, till, by a collision with some particular circumstances, it is elicited; and then it comes forth with a power capable of producing the most fatal effects. Till James and John had applied to the Lord Jesus for the two highest places in his kingdom, the other ten Disciples appeared content with any lot that should be assigned them: but when they had reason to apprehend that their more aspiring Brethren might be placed above them, they were filled with indignation against them, and were ready to dispute and quarrel with them for precedency. Then they shewed, that they themselves were as much actuated by ambition as the others; and were quite as averse to yield, as the others were anxious to obtain, the highest place of dignity and power. Unconscious of the evil that existed in themselves, they were soon offended at it in others: and it is observable, that we are never more easily offended, than when we behold in others the evil that is predominant in ourselves; so blind are we in our judgment, and so partial in our decisions.

But our blessed Lord gently corrected the errors of his Disciples; he shewed them, that they were altogether wrong in indulging such a desire after earthly distinctions; and that, if they would affect superiority at all, the only ambition that became them was, to excel in works and labours of love. This, which we may call *legitimate ambition*, he illustrated in a way,

I. Of contrast—

. The men of this world affect and exercise a lordly authority—

[Kings are rarely content with the measure of power with which they are invested by the laws, but are for the most part desirous of extending their prerogative; and not uncommonly they imagine, that they themselves are exalted, in proportion to the degree of power that they are able to exert. Nor does it in general suffice them to govern their own

own subjects: they too often wish to interfere with other potentates, and to control the acts of other sovereigns. The subjugation of other states, is in their eyes a source of enviable aggrandisement: and the greater success they have in prosecuting their ambitious projects, the more restless they become; till at last universal empire is scarce sufficient to satiate their desires. A fear of losing their own possessions, imposes indeed on many a salutary restraint: but where no such ground of fear exists, the tyrannical dispositions of men know no bounds. What the human heart is capable of, may be seen in Nebuchadnezzar; who ordered all the wise men in his dominions to be put to death, because they could not tell him a dream of his, which he himself had forgotten; and again commanded all who would not fall down and worship a golden image, which he had set up, to be cast into a fiery furnace. In a word, "all people, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him: whom he would, he slew; and whom he would, he kept alive^a."

The same dispositions are observable also in subordinate governors, and in all who are invested with authority: there is in every one a proneness to extend his power, and to make his own will the rule and reason of action to those around him: and the greater measure of despotism any one is able to exercise, the more he conceives himself to be exalted in the scale of being.]

But the very reverse of this should be the practice of God's people—

[We say not that a Christian may not be a king: (would to God that all the kings upon earth were Christians!) nor do we think it wrong for them to maintain the power assigned them by the laws: for they are invested with power by God himself, in order that they may exercise it for their people's good. Nor do we conceive that Christians of an inferior order should decline all offices of trust and power; or that power should not be exercised over the Church of God: for every society must be governed by laws: and it is desirable that the execution of the laws should be entrusted to those who will most consult the glory of God. But this we say, that no man should affect power under an idea that happiness consists in the possession of it, or that he himself is elevated and ennobled by it; nor indeed for any other end, than as it may be instrumental to the advancing of God's honour, and the happiness of mankind. The Christian must be the very reverse of that which we have seen to be the habit of the world. What worldly men *affect*, he must *despise*: and what they *exact* of others, he must, of his own mind

^a Dan. ii. 12, 13. & iii. 2—7, & v. 19.

mind and will, cheerfully *render* to all around him. Instead of wishing to enslave others, he must willingly make himself, so to speak, a slave to others; and account it his highest honour to render services even to the least and meanest of mankind: he must be the Minister of *all*, the *servant* of all^b.]

Our Lord proceeded to illustrate this idea further, in a way,

II. Of comparison—

Our blessed Lord has exhibited a perfect pattern for his people—

[He was, in a sense that none other can be, “the Son of Man:” he was, as the Jews themselves understood that name to mean, the Son of God, even God himself^c. Yet “he, though being in the form of God, and counting it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful men:” and, instead of appearing in outward pomp and splendor, and having the great men of the earth in his retinue, he came to minister unto his own rebellious creatures: yea, he waited upon them continually, “going about through all the towns and villages to do good” to their bodies and their souls. On his own immediate Disciples too he waited, condescending even to wash their feet. Nor did he only spend his life in the service of mankind, but at last laid down his life for them, to *ransom* their souls from death and hell. No sacrifice was too great for him to make for their welfare, no suffering too heavy for him to endure. He “bare their infirmities and sorrows” by tender sympathy, and “he bare also their sins in his own body on the tree;” enduring in his own person the curse due to them; that they through him might inherit eternal blessedness^d.]

To resemble him should be the summit of our ambition—

[As to the ends and purposes of his humiliation, he must for ever stand alone: for “no man can redeem his brother, or give to God a *ransom* for him^e.” But we may “bear one another’s burthens;” and we ought to do so; for this is the law imposed on us by Christ himself^f: we may consider all our faculties, and time, and wealth, and influence, as talents committed to our care, to be improved for God and for the benefit of our fellow-creatures: we may value them all, only as means of doing good: we may make the good of others to be the great

^b δῦλος imports a servant who was also his Master’s property.

^c Luke xxii. 69, 70.

^d 2 Cor. v. 21.

^e Ps. xlix. 7.

^f Gal. vi. 2.

great business and end of our lives, and study by all possible means to promote the comfort of their bodies and the salvation of their souls. We may cheerfully submit to sacrifice our ease, our reputation, our liberty, yea our very lives, in their service: yes; we may, and "we ought to, lay down our lives for the brethren," if by such a sacrifice we may promote their eternal interests^a. Here, I say, is scope for our ambition: nor can we possibly be too ardent in such a career as that. We must not indeed labour even in such a way for the honour that cometh of man: to be aspiring after eminence with a view to man's applause, would vitiate all the actions that we could ever perform, and deprive us of all hope of acceptance with God: but, if we abound in works and labours of love for the honour of God and the good of man, then, the more numerous and self-denying those labours are, the more exalted shall we be in the estimation of God himself; and if we would possess the most distinguished place in his kingdom, *this* is the legitimate and the only method to obtain it. We know that the apostle Paul was "not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles:" and the reason was, that "he laboured more abundantly than they all," and rendered both to God and man the greatest measure of difficult and self-denying services^b. In a word, he most resembled his Divine Master: and in proportion as we also resemble Christ, will be our real dignity and honour.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. The true nature of Christian morality—

[The generality of Christians have a scheme of morals scarcely elevated beyond the systems which were established by heathen philosophers: their morality is a system of pride; and, however wide its circumference, every line of it centers in self. But the morality of the Gospel is founded in humility, and, in every part of it, has respect to the glory of God. It requires us "not to live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again"— Were this more considered amongst us, we should not hear of persons founding their hopes of acceptance on their morality: for, where is there one who has regulated his life by this standard? If we try our morals by this touchstone, we shall see that the very best of us needs a Saviour, as much as the vilest of the human race — — — Let us remember then what true morality is, and labour to attain its utmost heights.]

2. The diversified uses that we are to make of our Saviour's death—

[Doubtless the first great use that we are to make of it, is,

^a 1 John iii. 16.

^b 2 Cor. xi. 5, 22—28.

is, to trust in it for our reconciliation with God. We all have sold ourselves to sin and Satan, and must all look to his blood as the price paid for our redemption. No other ransom ever was, or ever can be, paid for our souls: in *that* therefore must be all our hope, and trust, and confidence — — — But in the death of Christ we have also an assemblage of every virtue that suffering humanity can exercise. In that we have a pattern of all that is great and glorious; a patience invincible, a love that passes the comprehension either of men or angels. To that therefore we must look as to the pattern to which we are to be conformed: and though it is not possible that we should ever come near to his perfection, yet we must aspire after it; and, setting him ever before our eyes, must endeavour in all things to “walk as he walked.”]

3. The criterion whereby we are to judge of our spirit and conduct—

[It is often difficult to ascertain the precise quality of our own actions; but here are two things, by which, as by a rule or plummet, we may be enabled to form a correct judgment. Let us compare our spirit and conduct with that which is discernible in worldly men: and we may be nearly sure, that, if we resemble them, we are wrong. Let us next turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and see what his spirit and conduct were on similar occasions: and we may safely conclude, that we are right or wrong, in proportion as we resemble him, or differ from him. We do not undertake to say, that these tests are infallible in all cases; because a worldly man may sometimes do what is materially right, though from a wrong principle; and because the cases between our Lord and ourselves may not be sufficiently parallel: but the person who will habituate himself to try his spirit by these tests, will have a light, which will assist him in the most intricate paths, and preserve him from innumerable errors, into which he would fall, if he had no such clue to guide him. And let not this hint be overlooked; for, “who can understand his errors?” On many occasions, the Apostles themselves “knew not what spirit they were of.” Had they on the present occasion reflected either on the conduct of the world, or on the conduct of their Lord, they would have been kept from proud ambition on the one hand, and from envious indignation on the other. Whilst therefore we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, let us be thankful for any subordinate means of ascertaining his mind and will: and let us endeavour so to walk, that Christ himself may testify concerning us, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”]

DCCXXXVI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH IN PRAYER.

Mark xi. 24. *I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*

THERE is no grace more highly commended in the Scriptures, than faith: for though in some respects love may be considered as the greater, inasmuch as it more assimilates us to the Deity, and is of infinitely longer duration^a; yet faith is the parent of love, and the root of every other grace. Faith, above all other graces, honours God, and benefits the soul; for it gives to him the glory of all his infinite perfections, and brings down from him a supply of all those blessings which he has promised to bestow. Its efficacy is particularly seen in prayer: Our Lord has assured us, that it shall secure to us every blessing that we ask for: "I say unto you," &c. &c.

It is our intention to shew,

I. What is that faith which we are to exercise in prayer—

[Many distinguish between that faith which worketh miracles, and that whereby we obtain salvation: but I much doubt the propriety of the distinction, *as it is usually explained*. It is supposed that the faith itself is different: but I apprehend that the difference exists, not in the faith, but in the objects of that faith: the faith is the same; but its operation is different, according to the objects on which it is exercised. I would say of faith, that it is *an expectation founded on a promise*. To expect any thing which God has not promised, is *presumption*: to doubt the fulfilment of what he has promised, is *unbelief*: to expect the accomplishment of his word, is *faith*.

But promises are of different kinds; some are *absolute*, and others *conditional*: and the office of faith is to apprehend them *as they are given*; if they are given absolutely, we must expect them absolutely; if conditionally, conditionally. Our faith in each must be equally assured: we must as fully expect the accomplishment of a conditional promise *on the performance of the condition*, as of any promises to which no condition is annexed. But we must be careful not to construe the conditional as absolute,

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

solute, or the absolute as conditional: if we take the absolute promises, and make them to depend on the performance of conditions, we deny to God the exercise of his sovereign grace. If, on the other hand, we make the conditional promises absolute, and expect their accomplishment merely from the circumstance of their fixing themselves strongly on our minds; we shall, on the occurrence of a disappointment, be led to doubt the veracity of God, and to reject all his promises as unworthy of belief.

We will explain ourselves more fully.

There are many promises which we call absolute; such as those which relate to Christ as the Author of salvation to a ruined world^b; such as relate also to the increase and establishment of his Church^c; and such also as afford the broad grounds of hope to all who shall believe in Christ^d. We are to believe these as true and certain, independent of any title to them, or interest in them, possessed by us. *As applied to ourselves* indeed, they may be considered as conditional; but *as indefinitely taken*, they may be called absolute.

There are other promises which we call conditional; because they are made to persons of certain characters, or upon our performance of certain conditions^e: And these we are to believe as infallibly certain to all who attain the qualifications or perform the conditions. Yet we must not imagine that the qualification or the action forms the proper ground on which God bestows the blessing: the blessing is God's free gift, as well when it is conditionally granted, as when it is unconditional: the bestowment of Canaan on the descendents of Abraham was free, notwithstanding the final possession of it was suspended on their obedience to his commandments; and so it is in all cases: the performance of conditions may be appointed of God as means to an end; and the end may be inseparable from the means: but still the end is God's free gift; and from his free grace alone do we derive our title to it: the use of the means is no more than the beggar's stretching out his hand to receive a proffered donation.

Amongst these may be classed all temporal promises, such as those which relate to health, or riches, or honour: for these are no further promised than the bestowment of them shall accord with God's will, and be subservient to his glory. We shall have them in that measure that shall be conducive to our spiritual and eternal welfare. Promises also which relate to others, are of this kind. God engages to "pour out his Spirit on our seed and his blessing on our offspring," &c.^f

But

^b Gen. iii. 15. & xii. 3.

^c Isai. ii. 2. & xi. 6—9.

^d Isai. lv. 7. John vi. 37. Acts. xiii. 39. 1 John i. 7.

^e Matt. v. 3—10. xvii. 7, 8. & xi. 28, 29. Acts. xvi. 31.

^f Isai. xlv. 3—5.

But this cannot be fulfilled, unless the individuals themselves seek his blessing: and therefore it must be understood as subject to that condition.

Such then is the faith which we are to exercise in prayer. We are to lay hold on the promises of God in his word, and are to apprehend them, *not as they are applied to our minds, but as they are given by God*. Their striking our minds more or less forcibly makes no alteration in them: they are not a whit more or less certain on that account: their accomplishment is no otherwise affected by our conduct than as we exercise faith on them, or entertain doubts respecting them: if we do not credit them, they will not be fulfilled to us; if we do credit them, they will be fulfilled absolutely, or on our performance of the conditions, according to the quality of the promises themselves.]

Having stated what we apprehend to be the kind of faith that we are to exercise, we proceed to mark,

II. The importance of it towards the success of our prayers—

Two things are noted in our text, the one expressed, the other implied; and they will serve to shew us the importance of faith in the strongest light in which it can be seen:

1. *Without it*, no prayer even for the *smallest blessing* can succeed—

[If we go to God without faith, instead of honouring, we insult him; we tell him to his face, that the representations given of him in his word are too good to be true. Unbelief necessarily ascribes to God a defect either of power or of will to accomplish what he has promised: for if we believe him fully able, and fully willing, to accomplish his word, there remains no ground of doubt. It may be said that doubts may arise from a sense of our own unworthiness: but I answer, that all doubts ascribed to that source, have their origin in pride and ignorance: they argue an unwillingness to receive the promises in our proper character, and an ignorance of the freeness and fulness of the promises. Let us make the case our own. We have invited a person to come and receive some great benefit: and he no sooner comes into our presence, than he betrays a doubt about our sincerity, and a suspicion that we intend to disappoint him. Should we be pleased with such a person? Should we feel disposed to extend our benefits to him in such a state? In what light God

'Isai. xliv. 3—5.

God regards such persons, he himself has told us: he interprets all doubts of his power, or willingness to supply the necessities of his people, as a high provocation; an insult, that kindles his wrath against every person that indulges them^g: and he warns us, that every prayer offered in such a spirit shall be disregarded; and that it will be in vain for such a suppliant to expect ANY THING at his hands^h. Hence the command to all who would find acceptance to their prayers, is, to “lift up holy hands without wrath or *doubting*ⁱ.”]

2. *With it*, no prayer even for the *greatest* blessing can fail—

[Faith honours every perfection of the Deity: his power, his love, his faithfulness are all acknowledged, when we go to him in a firm expectation that he will fulfil his promises. Hence to such suppliants he gives a liberty to “ask for whatsoever they will,” and assures them, that he will fulfil *all* their petitions^k. He does not indeed bind himself to any particular *time* or *manner* of answering their prayers: he may see fit to *defer his answer* for a considerable time; but he will not delay beyond the best time^{kk}. He may also *withhold the particular blessing* that is asked; but he will give a better in its stead; as when he refused Moses his permission to go into the land of Canaan, but gave him a sight of Canaan, and then took him up to heaven^l. He may also *continue the affliction which we desire to have removed*: but he will give us grace to bear it; and will glorify himself by means of it; which, in the eyes of every real saint, will be incomparably better than the removal of it^m. It is possible enough that his people under particular circumstances may *think* that he has not answered their prayer; as for instance, when they have been praying for *spiritual benefits*, and he has sent them *temporal calamities*: but the truth is, that he makes their “tribulation to work patience, experience, and hope;” and it is not till long afterwards that they see how mysteriously, yet how graciously, he has answered their petitions. There is but one limit to their petitions, namely, the will of God: and if the desire be within that limit, every Believer may rest assured, that God either has answered his prayers, or will answer them in due timeⁿ.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. The true nature of prayer—

[It

^g Ps. lxxviii. 19—22, 40, 41.

^h Jam. i. 5—7.

ⁱ 1 Tim. ii. 8.

^k John xiv. 13, 14. & xv. 7. & xvi. 24.

^{kk} Luke xviii. 7.

^l Deut. iii. 25, 26. with xxxiv. 4, 5.

^m 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

ⁿ 1 John v. 14, 15.

[It is thought by men in general to be *a duty*: and a duty it certainly is in some point of view: but it should rather be regarded as *a privilege*. In what light did Hagar view access to a fountain, when she and her child were perishing with thirst? In what light did the man-slayer view his liberty of running to the city of refuge? Or in what light would any poor person consider the knocking at our door, when he was bidden to come for a supply of all his wants? Oh that we viewed aright God's invitations to a throne of grace! We should not come then, as too many do, to *perform a task*; to offer petitions which we neither expected nor desired to have answered; and which, if God should offer to grant them, we would pray back again with ten times more fervour than was put forth in offering them: No: we should come as children to a father, "delighting ourselves in him as our God," and saying with David, "At morning and evening and at noon-day will I pray;" or with the Apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."]

2. The folly of unbelief—

[Unbelief builds a wall, as it were, between God and us; it effectually prevents all access to him, and as effectually prevents the communications of his grace to us——— It may be thought, that if God has decreed to give us his blessing, our unbelief shall not prevent it; nor need we be solicitous about praying for it. But are we not told that Jesus "could not do many mighty works at Nazareth because of their unbelief?" Do we not remember that the Apostles failed in their attempts to cast out an unclean spirit "because of their unbelief?" Yea, are we not told, that, "notwithstanding a promise was given to the Israelites that they should enter into Canaan, they entered not in because of unbelief?" When God gave the most absolute promises, he said, "Yet will I be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them." And, when he declared by his Prophet, that he had "thoughts of peace towards his people to give them an expected end," he particularly added, that "then they should go and pray unto him, and should find him, when they should search for him with their whole heart." Let us guard then against this most pernicious evil, and go unto our God, saying, "Lord I believe: help thou my unbelief."

Yet, in exercising faith, we must guard against presumption; for if our faith be of an unhallowed kind, and go beyond the promise, it shall not be crowned with success. When Elisha heard that the Widow's son was dead, he sent his servant

^o Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^p Jer. xxix. 11—13.

servant with his staff, conceiving that the touch of that would suffice to restore him: but God had promised no such thing; and therefore the attempt failed.¹ But in exercising faith, let us exercise it assuredly indeed, but humbly, and in an exact conformity to the command of God.]

3. The wisdom of treasuring up the promises of God in our mind—

[These are the true ground and measure of our expectations from God. And, if we look into the holy Scriptures, we shall find, that there is not a state or condition in which we can be placed, but there is a promise exactly suited to it. We go with confidence to an honourable man, when we have a promise of any thing under his own hand: with what confidence then may we go to God, when we can take his promises along with us! Look at Jacob, how he pleads with God a promise that had been given him many years before²: see David pleading in like manner³: and learn from them the true use of the promises; “Nor ever stagger at them through unbelief; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God.” They are “exceeding great and precious,” commensurate with all our necessities. Let us therefore account nothing too great to ask; but “open our mouth wide, that God may fill it:” “nor shall one jot or tittle fail of all the good things that he has promised to us.”]

¹ 2 Kin. iv. 29, 31.

² Gen. xxviii. 15. with xxxii. 12.

³ 2 Sam. vii. 25. Ps. cxix. 49.

DCCXXXVII.

THE REGARD DUE TO CHRIST.

Mark xii. 6. *They will reverence my Son.*

THERE are many passages of Scripture, wherein God speaks of himself as frustrated and disappointed by the conduct of his creatures. We are not however to suppose that events happened really contrary to the purposes he had fixed or the expectations he had formed: for it is certain that “he doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth;” and that “known unto him are all his works, from the foundation of the world.” The truth is, that God speaks after the manner

manner of men, for the sake of accommodating himself to our low and feeble apprehensions; and therefore we must understand his words in a popular sense, without deducing from them all the conclusions which they may appear to warrant.

In the parable before us, he is represented as adopting an expedient, which, humanely speaking, could not fail of success. He had sent many servants to the Jews, in order to obtain from them the fruits of his vineyard: but some of them they had beaten, and others they had killed. "Having therefore One Son, his well-beloved," he determined to send him, judging it impossible, as it were, that they should lift up their hands, or move their tongues against him; "They will reverence my Son." But in the sequel of the parable we are informed, that, notwithstanding the numerous and solid grounds on which this expectation was formed, their hostility to him was more inveterate than it had been to any who had preceded him; and their treatment of him was the more cruel on account of the relation he bore to God, and the interest he claimed in the vineyard.

Conforming ourselves to the mode of speaking which God himself has suggested in the text, it will be proper to consider,

I. The grounds of his expectation—

If we were to confine the subject to Christ's reception among the Jews, we should notice the peculiar circumstances of his incarnation, the spotless purity of his character, the multitude of his benevolent and stupendous miracles, and his perfect correspondence with all that had been predicted concerning him. But, that we may bring the subject home to our own bosoms, we shall omit these general topics, which interest us chiefly as proving his Messiahship, and shall notice others which mark more strongly the grounds of a Believer's attachment to him.

God then may well expect us to reverence his Son,

1. On account of the dignity of his person—

[Jesus,

[Jesus, though born of a woman, differed infinitely from any other of the human race. He was, in an exalted and appropriate sense, the Son of God ; “ his only Son, his well-beloved.” He was God as well as man, “ God manifest in the flesh.” As he was “ perfect man, so was he also perfect God, equal with the Father as touching his Godhead, at the same time that he was inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.” Now if God had sent us an angel, or only a worm like ourselves, we ought to reverence him, because the authority of the King is to be acknowledged in his Ambassador. But when he sends his co-equal, co-eternal Son, who is “ Jehovah’s fellow,” even “ God over all blessed for evermore,” ought we not to testify all possible respect for him ? Surely when he comes to us in his Gospel, and declares who he is, and whence he came, it becomes us to bow the knee before him, and to welcome him from our inmost souls.]

2. On account of our extreme need of him—

[If we did not need a Saviour, we might disregard the Lord Jesus, on the principle that “ the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” But who amongst us is free from sin ? or who can make compensation to God for his iniquities ? Who can satisfy Divine justice, or avert the wrath which his sins have merited ? If we cannot do these things, and God has sent his only dear Son to do them for us, ought we not to reverence his Son ? Ought we not to receive him with the warmest gratitude and affection ? Suppose that, having sent his Son into this world, God were now to send him to the regions below, where millions of our fellow-creatures are enduring the punishment due to their transgressions : Would the unhappy sufferers disregard his offers of mercy as we do ? Would they not throng him on every side, and vie with each other in rending the air with their acclamations and hosannahs ? Why then should not we do the same ? for wherein do we differ from them, except in this, that we are under a sentence of condemnation, but on them the sentence is already executed ? Surely God may well expect, that we should be as solicitous to escape the wrath we fear, as others would be to obtain deliverance from the wrath they feel.]

3. On account of the benefits he will impart to us—

[If we hoped for nothing more than to avoid the miseries of hell, methinks we could never sufficiently reverence that adorable Saviour who came to deliver us from them. But this is a small part only of the blessings which he will bestow upon us. He will introduce us to the presence of his heavenly Father,

Father, and give us the most delightful fellowship with him: He will rescue us from the dominion of sin and Satan, and transform us into the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness: He will even exalt us to thrones of glory, and make us partakers of the honour and felicity which he himself enjoys at the right hand of God. And when God was sending us his own Son to impart all these benefits, had he not good reason to say, "They will reverence my Son?" If a doubt had been suggested whether such a Benefactor would be welcomed upon earth, should we not have been ready to inveigh against the person who suggested it, as a calumniator of the human race?

But events have happened widely different from this prediction. God, if we may so speak, has been disappointed in his expectations; and that too in an incredible degree. This will appear by considering,

II. The extent of his disappointment—

How the Lord Jesus was treated among the Jews, it is scarcely needful to mention. Those who are the least instructed amongst us know, that instead of being revered, he was loaded with all manner of indignities, and at last put to death, even the cruel and ignominious death of the cross. Amongst us, it may be thought, he meets with a more favourable reception: but in truth, God is as much disappointed in our conduct towards him, as in that of the Jews themselves: for,

1. His person is slighted—

[We do indeed externally revere the name of Jesus, and profess to call him our Lord and Saviour: but do we really reverence him in our hearts? Is he truly precious in our eyes? Is he "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely?" Alas! how many days and months have we passed without so much as one affectionate thought of him! How many years might we spend in different families without hearing any heart-felt commendations of him, or being once exhorted to love and serve him! The excellencies of others are painted in glowing colours: the praises of statesmen and warriors are sounded forth in every place: but in Jesus we "see no beauty, no comeliness, for which he is to be desired:" nor have we any delight in celebrating the wonders of his love.]

2. His authority is disregarded—

[If

[If we warn any person against such or such a line of conduct from the consideration of its being injurious to his health, his honour, or his interests, every word we utter will be duly weighed, and produce an effect suited to its importance. But if we say to any one, Our blessed Lord requires this, or forbids that, we only excite a smile of contempt; and the person goes on his way without the smallest concern. Nor is this peculiar to some hardened rebels: it is found equally in persons of every age and every rank. If we call upon the rich to obey his voice, they are too much occupied about the world to attend to our exhortations: they bid us go to the poor, who alone need be subject to such restraints. When we exhort the poor to serve him, they tell us that they are not scholars; that they have no time to attend to such things; and that the rich alone, who have learning and leisure, can properly be expected to devote themselves to his service. When we address ourselves to the young, they reply that it will be time enough for them to think of religion some years hence. And when we speak to the old, and endeavour to bring them into subjection to Christ, they reply with anger, that they have not learn their religion at this time of day; they do not like such novel notions; they have done to others as they would be done unto; and that they will go to Heaven their own way.]

We appeal to the observation and experience of all, whether this be not the way in which men almost universally treat the authority of Christ.]

- 3. His offices are superseded—

[Christ has undertaken, as a prophet, to teach us; as a priest, to make atonement for us; and, as a king, to rule over us. But do we seek to be taught by him in all things, conforming our sentiments gladly to his written word, and imploring earnestly the enlightening influences of his Spirit? Do we not rather lean to our own understanding, and adopt the sentiments of an ungodly world? Do we trust simply in his obedience unto death, renouncing unfeignedly every other ground of hope, and looking for acceptance solely through his blood and righteousness? Do we not rather substitute some works of our own in the room of his, or at least place some reliance on them instead of relying on him alone? How we set aside his kingly authority, has been already noticed. What shall we say then? Can God be pleased with this? Must it not be extremely painful to him to see all the offices which his dear Son undertook to execute for us, thus entirely superseded?

If any be disposed to contradict this statement, let them only look within, and, as in the presence of God, inquire,
Whether.

Whether they be really living by faith on Christ, and making use of him from day to day as their “wisdom, their righteousness, their sanctification, and redemption?” A candid examination of their own hearts will soon convince them, that their faith in Christ is rather nominal, than real; and that, while they acknowledge him as a Saviour, they do not cordially cleave unto him, or unreservedly embrace him.]

4. His cause and interests are opposed—

[One would imagine that they who do not reverence Christ themselves, would at least permit others to honour and adore him. But “the carnal mind is enmity against him;” and nothing will more effectually call forth that enmity, than a zealous endeavour to glorify his name. Men can see people on every side neglecting and despising Christ, and never once endeavour to reclaim them from their evil ways: but let any person begin to reverence Christ in his heart, and to manifest his regard to him by a suitable conversation, and they will instantly feel a fear and jealousy lest he should love and serve the Saviour too much. However excellent his conduct be, he will become an object of contempt and ridicule, in proportion as his love to Christ is influential on his heart and life. We appeal to matter of fact: Are not they who were respected and beloved while they were utterly regardless of Christ, considered as weak and contemptible as soon as ever they submit to his authority, and devote themselves to his service? Or, if their weight of character bear down this reproach, are they not lowered at least in the estimation of the world? It is a fact, that they are looked upon as signs and wonders; and that it is thought a disgrace by many even to be acquainted with them.

How astonishing then must be the disappointment of God the Father, when his only, his beloved Son is not merely rejected by the world whom he came to save, but is made a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, insomuch that an unfeigned attachment to him shall be sufficient to call forth their most contemptuous revilings, and, in many instances, their most cruel resentment!]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are disappointing the expectations of their God—

[You doubtless have expectations respecting the manner in which you shall be treated in the day of judgment. “You are saying, My God will surely have mercy upon me, and will save my soul.” But, if you are continually disappointing the expectations of your God, shall not you also be disappointed? Shall his hopes be frustrated, and yours realized;
more

more especially when his are founded on such a reasonable basis, and yours are altogether groundless? Ah! be assured of this, that God will have respect to none who do not reverence his dear Son; and that Jesus himself will say at last, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me.]"

2. Those who are endeavouring to fulfil the will of God—

[Thanks be to God, there are some who "honour the Son even as they honour the Father;" and whose delight it is to render him the fruits which he requires. Ye, Beloved, shall be highly favoured of your God; for he has said, "Him that honoureth me, I will honour." But shall ye receive honour from men? No, verily; for "the servant neither is, nor can be, above his Lord:" "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." "Marvel not then if the world hate you; but remember, that they hated Christ before they hated you:" and that, "if ye be hated for righteousness sake," ye have reason to "glorify God on this behalf." Only seek to express your reverence to Christ, not by needless singularities, but by solid and substantial piety; by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory.]

DCCXXXVIII.

THE RESURRECTION PROVED FROM THE PENTATEUCH.

Mark xii. 26, 27. As touching the dead, that they rise, have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

IT is no uncommon thing for persons to conclude a doctrine to be false, because it may be attended with difficulties which they are not able to solve. This is the great source of objections in the minds of infidels, who do not merely ask, "How can these things be?" but reject at once the plainest declarations of Scripture, because they cannot comprehend every thing relating to them. In this manner the Free-thinkers among the Jews discarded the greater part of the Scriptures, together with the most fundamental articles of their religion. They denied, for instance, the resurrection

resurrection of the body, and, it is supposed, the immortality of the soul also: and having, as they supposed, insurmountable objections to those doctrines, they came to propose them to our Lord, in full confidence that they should confound him, and overthrow the system which he was endeavouring to establish.

Their great objection was taken from the word of God itself, which appointed, that, if a man died childless, his brother should marry his widow, in order to raise up seed unto the departed person, and to prevent his name from being lost in Israel*. They, for argument sake, assumed a case, which certainly was within the sphere of possibility. They stated, that a man with six younger brothers died without children; and that, in compliance with the Divine command, his next brother married her; and he also died childless. In like manner all the brothers in succession married her, and all died without issue. Now, as the Sadducees imagined, that, if there were any future world, the same relationship as existed now must of necessity continue, they could not conceive which of the seven brethren would be acknowledged for her husband.

Our blessed Lord informed them, that they were quite mistaken about the nature of the future state; for that no matrimonial connexions would be formed there; but all would be, like the angels, wholly engrossed with spiritual delights: and, as to their secret thought that the Resurrection was a thing impossible, they erred from an ignorance of what the Scripture had said respecting it, and of the power of God to effect it. Our Lord then called to their remembrance the passage of Scripture which we have just read; and which we will now consider,

I. As establishing the point at issue—

The Sadducees acknowledged only the Five Books of Moses as of Divine authority: and therefore our blessed Lord, passing by the many plainer passages which are contained in the prophetic writings, ad-

duced

* Deut. xxv. 5—10.

duced one from the Book of Exodus^b, which, obscurely indeed, but certainly, contained the doctrine in question—

[God, when he spoke to Moses in the bush, announced himself to him as “the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.” Now this was two hundred years after the youngest of them was dead: and yet God speaks of the relation to them as still existing. But “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living:” the very title therefore which God assumed, implied that those persons were yet alive. Nor did it less forcibly imply, that their bodies also should be restored to life: for they, as men, consisted both of body and soul; and God was as much the God of their bodies as of their souls; and therefore if their bodies should never rise again, that relation had ceased with respect to their bodies. If it be said, that death had already terminated that relation; I answer, that their bodies were merely “sleeping in the dust” till the morning of the resurrection, when they shall awake to everlasting life; and that, as God was no less their God when they were asleep on their beds than he was during the day, so is he their God now that they are sleeping in their graves, as much as he ever was, or ever will be. *In respect of God*; with whom all things, past and future, are ever present, and “who calleth things that be not, as though they were,” *they are now alive*, seeing that they certainly shall live at the last day^c.

But the terms here used to designate the Deity, imply, that these Patriarchs had an interest in him, and were partakers of blessings from him. But, if their souls were not alive, they inherited no blessing from God; and if their bodies were not to rise, they would only be *partially* blessed: but they had served God with their bodies as well as with their souls: and therefore their bodies were entitled to a share of that reward which they had looked forward to, and in the prospect of which they had submitted to many hardships and privations: and that God, who had promised to be “their exceeding great reward^d,” would not deprive them of their expected benefits.

What weight this argument may have with modern infidels, I know not; but it convinced and confounded all the Sadducees; insomuch that “not one of them dared to put any other question to him^e.”]

Let

^b Exod. iii. 6, 16.

^c This seems to be the true sense of these words, πάντες γὰρ αὐτῷ ζῶσι: Luke xx. 38. See Beza's note on the place. Most other Commentators seem to mistake their import.

^d Gen. xv. 1.

^e Luke xx. 39, 40.

Let us proceed to consider the quotation,

II. As declaring the Believer's privileges—

All that the passage implied in reference to the Patriarchs, it implies in reference to Believers in every age. It implies,

1. That a relation subsists between God and them—

[The covenant which God made with Abraham was expressly made also with all his spiritual seed^f. His natural seed, *as such*, had no part in them: neither Ishmael nor Esau had any share in this covenant: it was confined, in the first instance, to him who was born after the promise; and afterwards to those who, like him, should be born of the Spirit^g. Amongst these, the true Believer is numbered, though he should have no relation to Abraham after the flesh. This is asserted by St. Paul in the plainest terms^h, and consequently, every Believer stands in the very same relation to God that Abraham himself did. Hear this, all ye who believe in Christ; every one of you may adopt the words of David, and say, "O God, thou art my God:" and, in saying this, you may claim all God's perfections to be exercised for you, as much as ever they were exercised for the Patriarchs of old.]

2. That covenant-blessings are provided for them—

[In the covenant were conveyed all spiritual and eternal blessings to those with whom it was madeⁱ: and if we believe in Christ, they all belong to us^k. In the present life we have a portion infinitely superior to that of the mere worldling: all that he feeds upon is as husks, in comparison of that heavenly manna which the saints partake of; they have "angels' food," "a peace that passeth understanding, a joy unspeakable and glorified." Whilst "the Egyptians were involved in darkness, the Israelites had light in their dwellings." But "who can conceive what God hath prepared for them" in a better world? Were they possessed of no better portion than what they have here, he would be ashamed to call himself their God: but St. Paul says, "He is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city^l." If then we truly belong to Christ, we may adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ^m."]

3. That

^f Gen. xvii. 7. 8.

^g Gal. iv. 22, 23, 30, 31.

^h Gal. iii. 7—9.

ⁱ Gen. xii. 2, 3.

^k Gal. iii. 13, 14.

^l Heb. xi. 16.

^m Eph. i. 3.

3. That in the last day these blessings shall be fully and eternally enjoyed—

[Whatever we possess in this world, it is only transient. The Believer's path is not always smooth: he has many trials; and "through much tribulation is his way to the kingdom." But in heaven he has arrived at a state of unmixed, uninterrupted happiness. There, his soul is at rest: here, he groans by reason of sin: there, "having awaked up after the perfect likeness of his God, he is satisfied with it": there, nothing finds admittance that can for a moment cloud his joy°. Here, he is dependent on others for a good measure of his happiness: but there no connexions can augment his bliss, nor can any operate to the diminution of it. In a word, "he is equal to the angels:" and as the Patriarchs are now in the full fruition of that portion, so shall he shortly be, and "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of his God."]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. To make a practical use of the holy Scriptures—

[We should not readily have conceived that such important truths were contained in the words of God to Moses, if our blessed Lord had not unfolded them to our view. But, in fact, there is in all the words of Scripture a depth which we cannot fathom. Of this we are not sufficiently aware; and therefore we content ourselves with a superficial view of them, without exploring diligently their contents. But our Lord teaches us to reflect on what we read: "Have ye not read so and so in the Book of Moses?" and ought you not from thence to have learned such and such truths? ought you not to have drawn from it such and such conclusions? We intreat you then, Brethren, to "mark, learn, and inwardly digest" what you read in the holy Scriptures; and to treasure up the truths contained in them for the instruction, and comfort, and sanctification of your souls.]

2. To seek an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ—

[It is in Christ only that we become partakers of the blessings of God's covenant: "If ye be Christ's," says the Apostle "then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise^p." Till we be united to Christ by faith, we have no part or lot in his salvation. O that all would consider this! O that all would inquire, what evidence they have that they have ever come to Christ aright, and they are really "accepted in the Beloved!" Brethren, flee to this adorable Saviour, and lay hold upon him, and cleave unto him with full

^a Ps. xvii. 15.

^o Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

^p Gal. iii. 29.

full purpose of heart; and then you may with confidence call God your Father, and say, "This God is our God for ever and ever."]

3. To look forward with joy to the eternal world—

[There will you meet all the glorified saints from Abel to the present hour. Not one of them is lost: God is still their God as much as ever. Dread not death then, which shall introduce you to their company—— Nor regret too deeply the loss of pious friends. Think that when you are following their bodies to the grave, their souls are in Abraham's bosom, feasting at the marriage-supper of the Lamb in heaven. What kind of knowledge we shall have of each other then, we know not: but it is probable that, as there are no relative connexions, so neither are there relative partialities; but all will be like the angels of God, filled with love and joy to the utmost capacity of their souls." In one respect indeed, the blessedness of the just is not yet complete; because their bodies are not yet raised to a participation of it; but we may look forward to the morning of the resurrection, when all who have fallen asleep in Christ shall awake unto life, and possess both in body and soul the full and everlasting enjoyment of their God. Brethren, "Comfort ye one another with these words."]

1 Thess. iv. 18.

DCCXXXIX.

LOVE TO GOD, THE GREAT COMMANDMENT.

Mark xii. 28—30. *And one of the Scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: This is the first commandment.*

IT is no uncommon thing for those who plainly declare the truth, to be beset by cavillers—

Our Lord, who spake as never man spake, endured continually the contradiction of sinners against himself—

He had been captiously interrogated by Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees; and having silenced all of them, was again attacked by one of the Scribes, who

who either was, or thought himself, more subtle than the other Pharisees who had already been confounded^a—

The answer of our Lord to him, will lead us to shew,

I. Who is the Christians' God—

Our Lord being questioned respecting the law, answered him out of the law^b.

His answer, which is given more fully than in St. Matthew's Gospel, intimates,

1. That we must know God before we can love him—

[Our love to God must be founded on what he is himself, and what he is, and will be, to us—

Without such a knowledge of God, all our pretences to love him must be vain—]

2. That there is but one God—

[The Heathen in general worshipped a multitude of gods—

Some, who were better instructed, supposed that there were two powerful Beings; the one the author of all good, the other of all evil—

Our Lord declared, in opposition to all such erroneous notions, that there was but One self-existent Jehovah, who made and governed all things—]

3. That that God exists in Three Persons—

[Some of the Jews, before the time of Christ, thought that there was a deep mystery contained in these words of their law^c—

Many early Christians were persuaded, that in these words God had given to the Jews an intimation of his subsistence in Three persons^d.

This is certainly the Scriptural view of God^e; and we may well take occasion from the text to speak of it; though it would not be prudent to found the doctrine altogether on the words before us—]

Having called our attention to the One object that is worthy of our affections, he shews us,

II. Our duty towards him—

We

^a ver. 13, 18, 28. with Matt. xxii. 34, 35.

Deut. vi. 4, 5.

Bp. Patrick on Deut. vi. 4.

^b Bp. Patrick on Deut. vi. 4.

^c Matt. viii. xxviii. 19.

We must not only love God, but our love to him must be,

1. Supreme—

[Our esteem of God should be so exalted, our desire after him so intense, and our delight in him so exquisite, that no created good should rival him for one moment in our affections—

Our love to him should destroy all love to what is evil, and both limit and regulate all our lawful attachments^{**}.]

2. Abiding—

[If we are to love him with *all* our heart, &c. there is no time when we are at liberty to offer him only a *divided* heart—

His excellencies never vary; and therefore our love to him should not change—]

3. Operative—

[Love to a fellow-creature is a mere pretence, if it do not approve itself to him in our actions—

Our love to God should make us exert all our powers for him[†], and seek his glory in all we do[‡]—]

In further elucidating our Lord's answer, we shall endeavour to explain,

III. Why that duty is called "the first and great commandment"—

The Jews doubted whether the moral law, or the ceremonial rites of circumcision and sacrifices, were the greater—

Our Lord tells them that the duty of love to God was beyond comparison greater than any, or all others together—

1. It is the noblest exercise of our faculties—

[Love, towards whomsoever it be exercised, whether friends or enemies, is a noble affection, and assimilates us to "God, who is Love"—

But the exercise of this affection towards God is suited to Beings who are endowed with reason, and destined to immortality—

Such an employment is an anticipation of Heaven itself—]

2. It is the foundation of all our other duties—

[Let

^{**} Luke xiv. 26.

[‡] 1 Cor. x. 31.

[†] This is implied in the word "*strength*."

[Let the best services* of a fellow-creature be divested of this principle, and they are good for nothing even in our eyes—

How worthless then must all our actions be in the sight of God, if they do not originate in a regard for him, and in a zeal for his glory!—

Surely love to God, as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, ought to be the one principle from which every thing else should flow—

Nor will any sacrifice go up with acceptance before God, unless it be inflamed with this heavenly fire—]

INFER,

1. How dreadfully are we fallen!

[Man originally fulfilled this command, just as they are now doing in Heaven—

But how far are we from such a state!—

What base and vile things have usurped the throne of God in our hearts!—

Let us humble ourselves in dust and ashes—]

2. How impossible is it that we should ever be justified by the works of the Law!

[If we would be justified by the Law, we must *perfectly* fulfil this duty from the earliest to the latest period of our existence—

But who has fulfilled it *perfectly*? or does? or can?—

Let us then renounce all dependence on the Law—]

3. What reason have we to be thankful for the blood of Jesus!

[The guilt we have contracted is more than words can express or imagination conceive—

Yet it may all be washed away in the fountain opened for sin—

O let us flee to Jesus, and bless God for such an all-sufficient Saviour—]

4. How should we value “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God!”

[The scope and intent of the Gospel is to restore us to our primitive state—

*To bring us to love God with all our hearts is the end of all its declarations and precepts, its promises and threatenings—

Let us then close with its offers, and shew forth its fruits—]

DCCXL.

LOVE TO OUR NEIGHBOUR.

Mark xii. 31. *And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: There is none other commandment greater than these.*

A QUESTION had been put to our Lord, What was the first and great commandment? To this he had answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." But, lest the Scribe should overlook his duties towards his neighbour, and plead perhaps the answer of Jesus as sanctioning such conduct, our Lord reminded him that there was another commandment, similar to that which he had already mentioned; namely, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

In discoursing upon this commandment, we shall shew,

I. What is the meaning of it—

Self-love is generally represented as a base affection of the mind; and doubtless it is so, as it exists in fallen man; because it is always inordinate, and excessive: but as it existed in the heart of Adam in Paradise, it was a good disposition, and absolutely necessary for his well-being. It has even now its legitimate exercise; and when directed to its proper objects, and confined within its just bounds, it deserves our approbation, and affords a correct standard for our love towards others.

Agreeably to this idea, we should shew an affectionate regard to our neighbour,

1. In relation to his temporal welfare—

[If we were labouring under any bodily disease, or misfortune of any kind, we should wish our neighbour to sympathize with us, and if possible to relieve us. Such regard then should we shew to *his person*, participating his joys and sorrows, and, like the good Samaritan, exerting ourselves to the utmost for his good^a — — —

Towards *his property* also we should maintain the same disinterested regard. We would not that another person should "wrong or defraud us in any matter:" we should wish to find

in

^a Luke x. 30—35.

in all his dealings the strictest integrity. Such then should be our conduct in all our intercourse with him. We should take a lively interest in whatever relates to him, and rather suffer wrong ourselves than commit the smallest trespass upon him^b — — —

We should extend our concern also to *his character*. We are extremely hurt if others take up prejudices against us, and listen to vague reports, and even by true representations lower us needlessly in the estimation of our fellow-creatures. We should therefore be candid in the construction which we put upon his actions; and be ever ready to cast a veil over his infirmities^c: we should “hope and believe all” the good of him that circumstances will admit of^d — — —

We should consult as much as possible *his peace and happiness*. There are innumerable ways in which others may grieve us without speaking any thing false, or doing any thing palpably unjust: and there are many ways in which they may promote the comfort of our minds. And there is no one who would not wish to see a benevolent disposition exercised towards him. Such then is the spirit which we should maintain towards others: we should seek our happiness in making others happy; and if necessitated to grieve them for their good, we should feel no rest in our own minds till it was restored to theirs^e — — —]

2. In relation to his spiritual welfare—

[Men, it is true, have but too little concern about their own souls: and therefore we must speak of the self-love that *ought* to exist within them, rather than of that which actually exists. Suppose then a number of persons to be sensible of the value of their souls, and to be earnestly desirous of obtaining mercy; would they not wish that one, whom they thought capable of instructing them, should labour to promote their eternal interests? Would they not wish that he should cheerfully endure reproach, or indeed even risk his own life, in order to effect their everlasting salvation? Such then is the concern we should express for the salvation of others; we should “greatly long after them in the bowels of Christ^f,” we should “gladly spend and be spent for them, even though the more we loved them the less we were loved^g,” if we had a prospect of being “offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith, we should consider it rather as a ground of congratulation and joy^h,” than of sorrow and condolence: yea, we should actually, if called to it, “lay down our lives for the brethrenⁱ.”

It

^b 1 Cor. vi. 7.

^c 2 Cor. ii. 2.

^h Phil. ii. 17.

^e 1 Pet. iv. 8.

^f Phil. i. 8.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 16.

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

^g 2 Cor. xii. 15.

It appears indeed, at first sight, that the love here inculcated, is to be confined to those of our own community^k: but other passages in the same chapter prove, that it is to be extended even to strangers^l; and our Lord's illustration of it shews, that it must reach even to our enemies^m.]

Having, though very imperfectly, ascertained its meaning, let us proceed to inquire,

II. Wherein it resembles the foregoing commandment—

It is like the former,

1. In extent—

[The duty of loving God comprehends every action, word, and thought, that relates to God: and as the four first commandments are contained in that, so every thing relating to our neighbour is included in the love which we should bear towards him. St. Paul enumerates not only the prohibitions of adultery, or murder, or theft, or perjury, as implied in this commandment, but even that prohibition which relates to the inmost emotions of the soul, "Thou shalt not covetⁿ." There is not a disposition of the mind towards our neighbour, which is not a violation of this commandment, or a positive compliance with it — — —]

2. In excellence—

[What can be more excellent than love to God? It is the brightest ornament and perfection of our nature. Such is also the love of our neighbour. View it as it manifested itself in the apostle Paul; and contrast the exercises of his mind with the selfishness which obtains in the world: how beautiful the one! how deformed the other! Let us only suppose all persons as studious to advance the interests of others, as they are to promote their own: let us suppose them as kind, as candid, as forbearing, as forgiving towards others, as they would wish others to be towards themselves: what a world would this be! it would be a very heaven upon earth — — — Truly, the commendation bestowed upon a compliance with this commandment^o, amply attests the mind of God respecting it — — —]

3. In importance—

[Without the love of God, all that we can possess is of no value. The same also may we say respecting the love of our neighbour. On it, no less than on the former, do the law and the prophets depend^p: without it, all our pretences to

^k Lev. xix. 18.

^l ib. ver. 33, 34.

^m Luke x. 29, 36, 37.

ⁿ Rom. xiii. 9, 10.

^o Jam. ii. 8.

^p Matt. xxii. 40.

to the love of God are vain¹. We may have the most eminent gifts, and appear to exercise the most distinguished graces, and after all be "nothing" in the sight of God, if we be not under the influence of this Divine principle². By this we fulfil the law³; and therefore the want of it must constitute us transgressors of the deepest die — — —]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. How much we need a Saviour—

[Ignorant people not only reject the Gospel, but cut off also one half of the Law, omitting what relates to God, and retaining only the duties of the Second Table. But we will suppose for a moment, that our duty to God is of no consideration; and that our duty to our neighbour comprehends all that we need regard; yet who will venture to rest his hopes upon this ground, that he has fulfilled his duty? Ah! we must be ignorant indeed, if we do not see that we have violated this commandment every day of our lives, and that "our mouths must be stopped as guilty before God."

Put away, my Beloved Brethren, your delusive hopes; and look for mercy through the merits of Him who fulfilled the law for you. It is through his vicarious sufferings that your selfishness must be pardoned⁴; and through his obedience alone that you must find acceptance with God⁵.]

2. How we may best approve ourselves to him who has become our Saviour—

[The fulfilling of this law is that which Christ regards as the most acceptable expression of our regard for Him. He has enforced it by new motives; and exemplified it in a new manner, and has taught us to consider our obedience to it as the best evidence of our sincerity. Behold then, ye professors of religion, what ye have to do: get your self-love mortified, and your love to others strengthened and increased. Get your hearts enlarged towards enemies as well as friends, ("for if ye love your friends only, what do ye more than others?") and "let your love to them be without dissimulation." There is indeed a peculiar love due to "the household of faith;" but though it should be superlatively exercised towards them, it should not be confined to them exclusively. Every human Being should have an interest in your regards; and towards all, you should do as you would be done unto. Let this be the invariable rule of your conduct; so will you adorn your holy profession, and glorify your Father that is in heaven.]

¹ 1 John iv. 20.

² 2 Cor. v. 21.

³ 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

⁴ Rom. v. 1.

⁵ Gal. v. 14.

DCCXLI.

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE MORAL LAW.

Mark xii. 32—34. *And the Scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*

IT is the Christian's duty to be ready at all times to "render a reason for the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear." But there are some situations wherein this is extremely difficult. If a person obviously come only to cavil, we cannot but be pained on his account; and we are apt to feel a degree of irritation also on our own. But we ought to be much on our guard against the smallest degree of asperity, lest we increase the prejudices which we should labour to subdue. It is true, we have not in such cases much prospect of success: but we learn from the instance before us, that we ought not to despair.

It was a question much agitated amongst the Jewish Doctors, What was the first of all the commandments; whether that relating to circumcision, (whereby they were admitted into covenant with God,) or that which respected sacrifices, (whereby they obtained acceptance with him,) or that about the Sabbath, (whereby they honoured him in a more especial manner,) or that respecting their phylacteries, (whereby they kept up the daily and hourly remembrance of him in their minds; for on their phylacteries, or borders of their garments, they wrote passages of the Law,) or finally, whether the Moral Law were not superior to the Ceremonial altogether? The Scribe who proposed this question to our Lord, though less captious than those who had preceded him, was under the influence of an improper spirit: yet our Lord returned to him, as he had done to all the others, a plain and incontrovertible answer, and thereby not only convinced his judgment, but in a
very

very considerable degree conciliated his esteem, and disposed him for receiving further information.

The answer which our Lord gave to him has already been considered. That which we are now to attend to, is the Scribe's reply; which naturally suggests to us the following observations:

I. That the great practical duties of the Law are supremely excellent—

The Scribe, not contented with the commendation bestowed upon them by our Lord, gives them a decided preference to all the most sacred institutions of the Mosaic ritual: and in this he was perfectly correct: for, however excellent they were in their place, the love of God and our neighbour are of infinitely greater value.

1. The great practical duties of the Law are good *for their own sake*; whereas the institutions of the Ceremonial Law were good only *as means to an end*—

[We must by no means depreciate the “burnt-offerings and sacrifices;” because they were the appointed means of reconciliation with God; they directed the attention of men to the great Sacrifice which was in due time to be offered; and they prepared the world for the coming of Christ. But still they had no intrinsic excellence: if separated from the ends of their institution, the blood of bulls and goats was of no more value than “the cutting off a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood.”

But the love of God and our neighbour is really of inestimable value: it is the appropriate exercise of our faculties; and, if carried to the extent that is enjoined in the commandments, it would be an anticipation of heaven itself* — — —]

2. The great practical duties of the Law *can be performed only by a renewed heart*; whereas the institutions of the Ceremonial Law *may be performed by the most abandoned of mankind*—

[A wicked Balaam could offer sacrifices in abundance: but who can put forth all his intellectual and active powers in love to God and man? None, but he who has been renewed by the Spirit of God. It is not possible for an unregenerate man to offer such sacrifices as these: they are far too high, too pure, too spiritual: he may easily burn upon an altar the bodies of slain beasts; but he cannot “present his own
soul

* See 1 Sam. xv. 22.

soul a living sacrifice to God;" he cannot have *that* inflamed with the fire of Divine love, unless he be regenerate and created anew in Christ Jesus— — —]

Respecting the practical duties of the Law, we may farther observe,

II. That they are such as must commend themselves to the conscience of every candid inquirer—

To those who are blinded by prejudice and passion, the words of truth and soberness appear as folly and madness^b. But, as our Lord's answer constrained the Scribe to confess that he had spoken truth, so must it prevail over every one that has a mind at all open to conviction. Let any one bring the great practical duties of the Law to the test; let him propose as severe a test as he will; and we will venture to affirm, that the more they are scrutinized, the more excellent will they appear.

1. Are they reasonable?

[What can be more reasonable, than that we should love Him who is infinitely lovely, and who has so loved us as even to give his only dear Son to die for us? — — —]

2. Are they conducive to our happiness?

[Wherein does the happiness of heaven consist, but in the exercise of love? Conceive of the whole heart, and mind, and soul, and strength being occupied in love to God; and our neighbour being in all respects loved as ourselves, and treated by us in every thing, as in a change of circumstances we should wish him to treat us; must we not be happy? With every bad passion so subdued, and every Divine affection so exercised, we say again, could we fail of being happy? — — —]

3. Are they perfective of our nature?

[The want of love is that which debases us even lower than the beasts that perish. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib:" but we, with all our advantages, are blind to the highest excellency, insensible of the greatest obligations, and regardless of our best interests. No words can describe the full malignity of such a state. But let a principle of love possess our souls, and it instantly refines all our feelings, regulates all our dispositions, and transforms

^b Our Lord compares the attempting to instruct such persons, to a casting of pearls before swine, who will only turn again and rend us. Matt. vii. 6.

transforms us into the very image of our God——— More cannot be said in confirmation of this truth; than what St. John hath said, “God is love: and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him^c.”]

4. Are they instrumental to the honouring of God?

[We know of no other way in which God can be honoured; because these two commandments comprehend the whole of our duty. But by abounding in a regard to these, we may, and do, honour him. This our Lord has plainly declared; “Herein is my father glorified that ye bear much fruit.” By the preaching of his word, his name is known; but it is by the practical effects of that word upon the hearts and lives of his people, that his image is reflected, and the efficacy of his grace displayed———]

A candid mind, we have said, must acknowledge the excellency of duties which are capable of standing so severe a test: and, for the encouragement of such candour, we observe,

III. That an approbation of them argües a state of mind favourable to the reception of the Gospel—

When there is a readiness to approve the boundless extent of these commandments, there must of necessity be,

1. An openness to be convinced of our lost estate—

[It is an ignorance of the spirituality of the law, that causes men to deny their desert of God's wrath and indignation. They think that a very small degree of love to God, and a very partial regard to their fellow-creatures, is the whole of their duty: and, if they have not violated the commandments by some gross and flagrant transgression, they imagine, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel, that they “have kept them all from their youth up.” But let a person once acknowledge it his bounden duty to love God with *all* his heart, and *all* his understanding, and *all* his soul, and *all* his strength, and to love his neighbour *in all things* as himself, and he can no longer resist the conclusion, that his whole life has been one continued act of sin; for there has not been one day, one hour, one moment, wherein the frame of his mind has perfectly corresponded with the demands of the Law. I was such a view of the Law that made Paul confess himself a lost sinner, under a sentence of eternal condemnation; and was the first thing which overcame his aversion to the Gospel^d.]

2. A

^c 1 John iv. 16.

^d Rom. vii. 9.

2. A willingness to embrace the offers of salvation—

[This necessarily follows from the former. A man, who feels himself perishing, cannot despise an offer of deliverance. One who had not committed homicide, might view a city of refuge with indifference; but one who saw the pursuer of blood close upon him, would flee to it with all his might — — —]

3. A readiness to receive and improve the aids of God's Spirit—

[No one can view the "exceeding breadth of these commandments," without feeling the impossibility of keeping them by any strength of his own. While he thinks the Law extends no farther than to the outward act, he supposes himself capable of performing all that is required: but when he sees that it reaches to the heart, he is easily persuaded, that he needs the agency of God's Spirit to qualify him for a due discharge of his duty. He therefore will be glad to hear that God has "promised the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." He will think it no indignity to stand indebted to a divine agency: on the contrary, while his approbation of the commandments inclines him to obey them, he will thankfully accept the proffered influences of the Spirit, and rejoice in the prospect of being "able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him."]

These things necessarily resulting from a just knowledge of the Law, and being the characteristic marks of those who embrace the truth, they must needs be also good preparatives for the reception of the Gospel.

[Such was our Lord's judgment in reference to the Scribe, when he had heard his approbation of the Moral Law. And to every one that manifests such a disposition, we may say with our Lord, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."]

We shall now CONCLUDE with a word,

1. Of caution—

[Surely *they who indulge prejudices against the truth*, and cavil at the Gospel instead of embracing it, should well consider how awful their condition is: for if one, who yields to conviction, and acknowledges that conviction before his ungodly companions, and exposes himself thereby to shame and reproach for conscience sake, may yet be only near to the kingdom of God, and not a partaker of it, what must be the state of cavillers, and of those who reject the truth?

They

They also who approve of the truth in their hearts, and shew a decided regard for those who preach or profess it, should take care not to rest in such a state. For to what purpose is it to be "not far from the kingdom of God," if they be not afterwards brought into it? To what purpose is it to be "almost Christians," if they do not become such altogether? To what purpose is it to have "a name to live," if yet they continue "dead?" The wise virgins only, who had oil in their lamps, were admitted to the wedding-feast; the others, who had the lamps without the oil, the appearance but not the reality of grace, were excluded from it. Alas! what a mortification must it be to such in the eternal world, to find that once they were not far from the kingdom, but that, after all, they fell short of a participation of it; that they dropped into hell, as it were, even from the gate of heaven! Oh! I would most earnestly caution you against sleeping in such imminent danger, and against resting in any thing short of a thorough conversion.]

2. Of encouragement—

[We trust there are many who, when they hear the demands of the Law, and the declarations of the Gospel, are ready to say, "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth." To such then we would address ourselves in the most encouraging terms; ye "are not far from the kingdom of God." Only go on a little further, and you will be brought effectually into the kingdom. Seek to know the way of God more perfectly. Make your inquiries, provided you make them in a candid spirit. Endeavour to improve all opportunities of instruction. The word of God to you is, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." Be thankful for the light ye enjoy; and for the smallest disposition to improve it. And endeavour that your knowledge lead you to Christ, and produce suitable effects upon your hearts and lives: so will you become members of Christ's kingdom on earth, and finally be partakers of his heavenly kingdom.]

DCCXLII.

THE WIDOW'S MITE.

Mark xii. 41—44. *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his Disciples, and saith unto them, Verily, I say unto you, that this poor widow*

hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

THE morality of the Gospel is applauded by most: yet there are few who do not, by their explanations and comments, deprive it of half its excellence. The “turning of the left cheek to him who has smitten us on the right;” the “surrendering of our cloke to him who has already taken away our coat;” the “forgiving of an offending brother, not only seventy times, but seventy times seven;” these, and other precepts of a sublime import, are reduced to little more than an abstinence from revenge; so anxious are men to reduce the Scripture to their own practice, rather than to elevate their practice to the standard of God’s word. The same would be done in reference to the great duty of liberality; but happily an example is set before us which cannot possibly be explained away. Had the conduct of this poor widow been merely set forth in a way of precept, instead of being exhibited in actual life, it would have shared the fate of those other precepts, and have been pared down to a general commendation of self-denying charity. But here is no opportunity afforded us for talking about Eastern metaphors, and figurative expressions; here is a plain simple fact, decidedly approved by Him who cannot err; and consequently, it may be regarded as an illustrious example, which, as far as we may be in similar circumstances, we shall do well to follow.

Let us consider,

I. Our Lord’s commendation of the widow—

[In the Temple there was a treasury, where all who felt their hearts disposed to make a voluntary offering to the Lord, were enabled to do it: and the money so collected was expended in the service of the sanctuary, either in sacrifices that were to be offered, or in the wood, and salt, and other things necessary for the offering of them. Depraved as that generation was, the custom of contributing freely for these purposes very generally prevailed: it seems, that “the people” in general, and not merely a few liberal individuals,
“cast

“cast in” their contributions. *Many* that were rich contributed *largely*: but a poor widow, who possessed only a single farthing in the world, gave *that*, even “all her living.”

Now it may well be doubted whether there be a man upon earth who would not have disapproved of this act, if our Lord himself had not expressly commended it: they would have blamed it as *unnecessary*, as *useless*, as *presumptuous*: *unnecessary*, because God could not require any offering at the hands of one who was so indigent; *useless*, because a farthing towards the expenses of the Temple was literally no more than a drop in the ocean; and *presumptuous*, because to cast away her *all*, was to tempt God, and to expect a further supply from him, when she was throwing away the supply he had already afforded her.

But our blessed Lord took pains, (if we may so speak,) to express his approbation of it. “He called his Disciples to him,” to inform them of it, and to declare to them his sentiments respecting it. We do not apprehend that he knew the circumstances from any conversation he had had with her: he had no need to be informed by others, because he himself was omniscient: and he declared without hesitation, that this donation of hers, small as it might appear, and highly indiscreet, was indeed both *great* and *good*: it was *great*, inasmuch that it exceeded all the accumulated presents of the rich who had contributed; since they had only given *a part* of their property, “out of *their abundance* ;” whereas “she, of *her want*, had given *all* that she possessed, even *all her living* :” it was also *good*, because she had given it with a single eye to the glory of God; and God, who knew the motive by which she had been actuated, accepted it as “an offering of a sweet-smelling savour.”]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Among many other lessons we may learn from it,

1. How to estimate charity—

[We are apt to estimate it by the amount that is given on any occasion: but this affords no proper criterion for judging of real charity: *that* must be judged of, first, by the proportion which the donation bears to the ability of the donor; and, next, by the disposition and design of him that gives it. Donations that are large in the actual amount, may yet be small, when taken in connexion with the donor's opulence: whilst the smallest gifts, as in the instance before us, may be truly great, on account of the indigence of him that bestows them. This is told us by St. Paul, who says, that “God accepts them according to that a man hath, and not according

according to that he hath not^a:" if only there "be a willing mind," the amount of the gift makes no difference in his eyes^b. That which gives every thing its chief value is, its being done with an unfeigned desire to please and honour him. Without that we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and yet have not one atom of that charity which will be approved of our God^c.]

2. How to practise it—

[Much was there in the conduct of that poor widow that is deserving of imitation. We should dispense our charity *secretly*. We are well assured, that there was nothing of ostentation in her upon this occasion; else our Lord would not have bestowed such commendation upon her. She wanted none to be spectators of her liberality; it was sufficient for her that God was privy to it. Thus "our left hand should not know what our right hand doeth." There are occasions indeed, when, for the sake of example, it is necessary that our liberality should be known: but, when that is not the case, we should rather affect privacy, and be satisfied with approving ourselves to God.

We should also dispose of our money *cheerfully*. She needed not to be urged to it: she was happy in serving God^d; and doubtless, instead of imagining him indebted to her for any service she could render, she considered herself infinitely indebted to him for the disposition he had given her.

We should also impart *liberally* of what we possess. If any be disposed to set aside her example as singular, and not intended for our imitation, we appeal to similar conduct in the Churches of Macedonia; where, in the midst of *deep poverty*, they abounded unto the *riches of liberality*; and gave, not only according to their power, but even beyond their power, being willing of themselves, and praying the Apostle with much intreaty to be the distributor of their alms^e. We may indeed be foolishly prodigal in giving where the occasion does not require it: but, if we have really an eye to the honour of God, we need fear no excess. Many may proudly *talk* of giving their *mite*; but we shall not find many that will really do it: but the more we can deny ourselves for God, the more acceptably shall we serve him.]

3. How to act on the present occasion *—

^a 2 Cor. viii. 12.

^b ib.

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^d "Ready . . . willing." See 1 Tim. vi. 18. & 2 Cor. ix. 7.

^e 2 Cor. viii. 2—4.

* If this be the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, a comparison may here be instituted, between the occasions for exertion; and the urgency of the particular occasion be insisted on. It may also be stated, that, if carnal sacrifices were offered to God by means of the contributions
in

in the one case, the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving will abound in the other. It may also be suggested, that the Lord Jesus has his eye upon the treasury, and is observant of every one, to mark, both what he gives, and by what motives he is actuated: and that he will bear testimony to our liberality in the day of judgment, and confer on us a reward proportioned to it. 2 Cor. ix. 6.

DCCXLIII.

THE DUTY OF WATCHFULNESS ENFORCED.

Mark xiii. 32—36. *But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.*

ON different occasions, but especially at the close of his life, our Lord taught his Disciples to look forward to a future period, when he would assuredly come again. He specified two objects for which he would come; the one was, to destroy Jerusalem; and the other, to judge the world: and, inasmuch as the former of these advents was typical of the other, he blended them both together, and thereby raised in them an expectation that they should take place at the same time. The truth is, that though the one was accomplished within forty years, and the other, notwithstanding almost eighteen hundred years have already past, remains yet to be accomplished at some distant and unknown period, they are both equally present in the mind of God, “with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years:” And it is also true, that the day of death is to every man, *in effect*, as the day of judgment: so that the union of the two periods in their minds, notwithstanding their distance from each other, was strictly just, as it respected God, and highly salutary as it respected them. Not but that

that our Lord did make a clear distinction between the two periods: for in v. 30, he says, "This generation shall not pass till all *these things* (relative to the destruction of Jerusalem) be done; and then, in a way of contrast, he adds, "But of *that day* and *that hour*, namely, the day of judgment, knoweth no man." It is in reference to this latter period that he speaks in the words of our text; in discoursing on which we shall consider,

I. The duty inculcated—

Watchfulness and prayer are often united in the holy Scriptures as duties of the first importance. In themselves they are different; but in their exercise they are inseparable: neither would be of any avail without the other: prayer without watchfulness would be hypocritical; and watchfulness without prayer, presumptuous. We shall therefore combine the duties, as though it had been said, *Watch in the exercise of prayer*. And that we may yet further simplify the subject, we shall not enter into a detail of particulars, but rather follow the general ideas of our text; and shew,

1. What we should watch and pray against—

[Here we must include *every thing which has a tendency to lull us asleep*. We see how intent men are on all the things of time and sense: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, so occupy them, that they find no time nor inclination for spiritual concerns — — —

Against these then we should "watch and pray:" we should watch, to prevent them from gaining an ascendant over our hearts; and cry mightily to God to keep us from yielding to their influence. Seeing how the whole world is led captive by them, we should tremble for ourselves; and day and night intreat God rather to leave us destitute of all earthly things, than to give us over to the love of them, or suffer them to deprive us of eternal happiness — — —]

2. What we should watch and pray for—

[To be found ready, at whatever moment our Lord shall call for us, should be the one object of our ambition. With this view, we should seek to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God through faith in Christ. Not content with a general hope of acceptance

through Christ, we should wash our every sin, yea our every duty also, in the fountain of his blood, which must cleanse us from the "iniquity even of our holiest actions." We should seek also to "be renewed in the spirit of our minds," and to be transformed into "the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness." No attainments should ever satisfy us: if we were as holy as Paul himself, we should, like him, "forget the things that are behind, and reach forward towards that which is before." With a view to progressive holiness, we should carefully "abide in Christ," "living by faith on him," and receiving daily out of his fulness grace for grace: assured, that without him we can do nothing, but through him shall be enabled to do all things. In a word, we should seek to be ever ready to meet our God; yea to be "looking for, and hasting unto the coming of that day," when we shall be summoned to his tribunal, and receive our eternal doom——

For the attainment of this happy frame of mind, we should be watching our progress in the Divine life, and praying day and night *to God* to perfect in us the work that he has begun——]

Let us next attend to,

II. The considerations with which it is enforced—

These may be comprehended in the two following:

1. The uncertainty of the time when our Lord shall call us—

[The time of the general judgment is unknown to the holy angels; nor was it revealed even to the Messiah himself for the purpose of communicating it to us^a. And there was good reason why it should be concealed; because if it had been represented as at a great distance of time, men might have become secure; whereas the idea of its speedy arrival tended to quicken all to holy exertion. In like manner the uncertainty of the time of our death has a very salutary effect; since it necessitates us to be always ready. The idea of a man going a long journey, and leaving his servants their appointed work, and ordering them to expect him every moment till they see him, justly illustrates this point. There is not a moment of our lives when we may sit down secure. The night was divided into four watches, which terminated at evening, at midnight, at the cock-crowing, and in the morning. Now at no one of these periods are we sure that we shall not be summoned into the presence of our God.

What

^a As God, one with the Father, he knew all things; but as the Mediator, he received his instructions from the Father, and delivered nothing but what he had before received. John xiv. 49. Rev. i. 1.

What a consideration is this to enforce the duty in our text! Who that reflects one moment on the possibility of his being called this night to the judgment-seat of Christ, must not desire to be found in the exercise of watchfulness and prayer? — — —]

2. The awfulness of being found in a sleeping state—

[In the parable of the Ten Virgins we are informed what we must assuredly expect, if we indulge in careless security; we shall be shut out from the marriage-supper of our Lord, and be “cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It will be to no purpose to plead, that we were not engaged in any wicked projects. We were “slothful servants,” and therefore are justly regarded as “wicked:” we were unprepared, and therefore are justly cut off from all further opportunity to prepare for our great account; we treated heaven with contempt, and therefore we are consigned to the miseries of hell — — —

Who that contemplates these tremendous consequences, must not determine with God’s help to watch and pray through the whole remainder of his days? — — —]

Our Lord’s concluding admonition, “What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch,” will lead us to ADDRESS some different descriptions of persons:

1. The old—

[Is so much of your time gone, and will you not improve the remainder? — — —]

2. The young—

[What security have you against death, that you should delay so necessary a work? — — —]

3. The afflicted—

[God sends your afflictions on purpose to awaken you from your slumbers, and to stir you up to heavenly pursuits: What an aggravation will it be of your guilt, if these dispensations pass away unimproved!]

4. The backslidden—

[What an awful thing is it, that, instead of having advanced in the Divine life, you have lost in a good measure the life which you once had! Attend to God’s admonition to the Church of Sardis, lest he execute upon you the judgment that he threatened to inflict on them^b — — —]

5. The more stedfast Christian—

[Experience

^b Rev. iii. 2, 3.

[Experience proves that the exhortation to "watch" is not less necessary for you than for others. How many who are on the whole pious, grieve, by their unwatchfulness, their Divine Master! Be on your guard against such a slothful way of seeking him as his Bride was found guilty of^c; nor think to justify your sloth by such frivolous excuses as were urged by her^d. If you act like her, like her you will reap the bitter fruits in the hidings of his face^e. To you then no less than to others I would say, "Sleep not as do others, but watch and be sober^f."]]

^c Cant. iii. 1.

^e Cant. iii. 1—4. & v. 2—6.

^d Cant. v. 2, 3.

^f 1 Thess. v. 6—8.

DCCXLIV.

WE SHOULD WATCH FOR OUR LORD'S SECOND COMING.

Mark xiii. 37. *What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*

GOD is pleased to speak to us, not only in his word, but by the dispensations of his providence. Calamities, whether foreign or domestic, whether public or personal, are sent by him to awaken our drowsy consciences, and to stir us up to a remembrance of our latter end. By all of them, whether menaced only, or actually inflicted, he addresses us, as Jesus did his Disciples (whom he had forewarned of the evils coming upon Jerusalem, and hereafter also upon the whole world), "Watch therefore, for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh."

On a subject like this we should in vain attempt to speak any thing new. But though we may do no more than remind you of truths with which you are already well acquainted, it will not be unprofitable for me to suggest to your thoughts,

I. The uncertainty of the time when our Lord will come to judgment—

[Our Lord, in illustrating what he had been speaking respecting the day of judgment, compares himself to a master leaving his house, and appointing his servants their work, and commanding his porter to watch, in order to admit him without delay at whatever moment he should return. He represents the precise time of his return to judgment as unknown to men, or angels, or even to himself; (so far

far' at least, that the Holy Spirit, 'by which he was anointed to his prophetic office, had not communicated it to him as any part of the revelation which he was to make known to men;) and from thence inculcates the necessity of incessant watchfulness. Now, as the time of death is to us the commencement of our eternal state, and as it is equally unknown to us as the judgment itself, we shall direct our attention more particularly to that.

But what shall we say on such a subject as this? It needs neither proof nor elucidation: nor can any words make the uncertainty of life more evident, than the observation and experience of every man have already made it. We appeal to your observation of what takes place around you: Does not our Lord call men to death and judgment at every age, and often when his summons is least expected? — — — We appeal to your experience: Can you not recal to your minds many accidents which might have proved fatal? and do you not see, that you are yet liable every day and hour to be taken away by disease or accident? — — —]

Instead of dwelling on so obvious a truth, we will endeavour to point out,

II. Our duty arising from this consideration—

Thrice in the space of a few verses does our Lord repeat the same injunction, "Watch^a." To enforce this, we would say,

1. Expect the second coming of your Lord—

[Put not from you, as you are too apt to do, the thoughts of death and judgment, but cherish them in your minds, and labour to get them impressed upon your hearts. Reflect upon their *uncertainty*, as to the precise period of their arrival, their *nearness*, their *awfulness*; and keep yourselves, as it were, in the daily and hourly expectation of them — — —]

2. Prepare to meet him—

Two things are indispensable for all who would behold his face in peace, namely, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." These must be experienced by you — — — neither the one nor the other can be dispensed with — — — Get a deep repentance therefore, and a lively faith: and rest not in any state short of that which the Scriptures require, and the primitive Christians actually attained.]

3. Guard against any measure of drowsiness which may

^a See ver. 33.

may interrupt or render doubtful your preparation for him—

[It will be a fearful thing if the Master of the house “should find you sleeping.” Yet who amongst us is not apt at times to be “weary in well-doing?” “The wise virgins, as well as the foolish, slumbered and slept:” yea, even the Apostles slept, when our Lord had bidden them watch. We should therefore “exhort one another daily, and so much the more as we see the day approaching:” and, instead of giving way to sloth, should use all possible means, to “strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die.”]

ADDRESS,

1. The careless—

[How many continue such in spite of all the warnings which they have received from sickness in themselves, or the sudden deaths of others! But what will they think of their conduct, when once they are taken hence? If any one of us knew that a thief would certainly come this very night to break into his house, would he lay himself down to sleep as at other times? Should we not watch, and use our utmost efforts to frustrate his designs^b? Why then do we not act thus in reference to our souls? Are our souls of less value than our property, or the concerns of time than those of eternity? Are not the consequences of unwatchfulness sufficiently awful^c? And is not our real danger increased, rather than diminished, in proportion to our security^d? To every one then who is unconcerned about his eternal state, and unprepared to meet his God, we address the reproof which even heathen mariners gave to a prophet of the Lord; “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise and call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee, and thou perish not^e.”]

2. The half-awakened—

[Pardon the term: it is but too appropriate to the states of many, who, if good wishes would carry them to heaven, would not come short of it; but, when God calls them to run, and strive, and wrestle, and fight, will not exert themselves in the way that he requires. Nevertheless God's word is true; “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force:” “Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able;” none shall succeed but those who “strive.” Guard then against the fate of the foolish virgins, who were not aware of their want of Divine grace, till it was too late to obtain

^b Matt. xxiv. 43.

^c Matt. xxiv. 48—51.

^d 1 Thess. v. 3. Prov. vi. 9—11.

^e Jonah i. 6.

tain it^f. Let the Apostle's exhortation sink down into your ears^g, and adopt instantly the resolution of the Prophet, "I will stand upon my watch-tower, and will watch to see what God will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am re-proved^h."]

3. The professing people of God—

[Think not yourselves above the exhortation in our text: "What we say unto some, we must say unto *all*, Watch." See what a caution our blessed Lord addressed to his own Apostlesⁱ: and then say, whether *any* caution can be too strong for *you*. Many who have appeared to run well, have turned back again; and not a few have died without ever returning to the good way from which they have departed. Be ye then on your guard, "lest, having known the way of righteousness, ye turn from the Holy Commandment delivered unto you." Beware of imitating the slothful conduct of the Spouse in Solomon's Song, lest, like her, you-provoke your heavenly Friend to depart from you^k. Watch unto prayer with habitual persevering earnestness^l. You know the truths we have insisted on; act therefore agreeably to them, and to your holy profession^m. "Have your loins continually girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord *."]

^f Matt. xxv. 8—13.

^g Rom. xiii. 11—14.

^h Hab. ii. 1.

ⁱ Luke xxi. 34—36.

^k Cant. iii. 1 & v. 2—6.

^l Eph. vi. 18.

^m 1 Thess. v. 2, 4—8.

* Supposing this were a *Funeral Sermon* for a truly pious person, some little mention of his character might be made here.

DCCXLV.

COMMENDATION OF MARY'S LOVE.

Mark xiv. 8. *She hath done what she could.*

OCCASIONS sometimes arise, wherein it is difficult to discern the precise line of conduct we should pursue. In a season of public festivity, for instance, or on account of some domestic occurrences, we may be called to unite in feasting, and perhaps to incur considerable expense in providing entertainments for others: and a doubt may well arise in our minds, how far we ought to countenance such proceedings, and whether we ought not rather to save
our

our money for the support of the poor. But we must not expect to have our path so clearly marked, but that there shall be abundant room left for difference of opinion in such things. All that seems practicable is, to lay down general principles, and to view the Lord Jesus Christ as an example best fitted to assist us in the application of them. There certainly are times, when, according to our rank and station in life, we should "be given to hospitality," and unite in "rendering honour to whom honour is due." Yet we have need, on the other hand, to guard against the indulgence of an ostentatious or worldly spirit. To lean to the side of moderation is undoubtedly the safer plan: nevertheless, when just occasions present themselves, there is a liberality that well befits the Christian character.

We read in the preceding context that a feast was made for our Lord in the house of Simon, the leper; and that Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead, was one of the guests invited to meet him. Our Lord did not refuse to sanction a feast prepared for his sake: nor, when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, manifested her regard for him in a way that had an appearance of extravagance, did he condemn her for it: on the contrary, he judged that it was suited to the occasion; and therefore he vindicated her from the uncharitable censures which his own Disciples passed upon her, and declared his decided approbation of what she had done.

We propose to consider,

I. The act commended—

There are two points of view in which this may be considered:

1. As retrospective—

[The act itself was this. Whilst Jesus reclined at the table, Mary came with "an alabaster-box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, and on his feet; and then wiped his feet with her hair."

Now in this act she had respect to all the kindness which the Lord Jesus Christ had shewn both to her and to her family. He had favoured them with a more peculiar intimacy,
and

and had testified on many occasions a pre-eminent regard for them. The opportunities thus offered them for spiritual good, had been improved by all of them; but especially by Mary. When Martha had studied chiefly to shew respect by external services, Mary had been intent on acquiring good to her soul from his instructive discourses; and, on being blamed by Martha for neglect of duty, she was applauded by her Lord for having "chosen a better part, which should never be taken away from her."

But there was one mercy in particular which she had received from the Lord Jesus, and which had filled her soul with the profoundest gratitude. Her brother Lazarus had been raised by him from the dead. Jesus had not indeed come to them so speedily as they had wished; but this delay gave him an opportunity to display towards them in a more abundant measure the riches of his grace, and the all-sufficiency of his power. He expressed his sympathy with them under their affliction; and taught them to expect from him not only the restoration of their departed brother, but the everlasting salvation of their own souls ^a — — —

How to requite all this kindness she knew not, but what she could do, she most gladly did; and, without any fear of the uncharitable constructions that were likely to be put upon her conduct, as ostentatious, obtrusive, prodigal, she determined to honour him before all to the utmost of her power.]

2. As prospective—

[We do not apprehend that Mary herself had any idea of confirming our Lord's assertions respecting his approaching death. But as the Prophets of old were inspired by the Spirit of God to speak things which they themselves did not understand^b, and as Caiaphas, the High Priest, had very recently foretold (though unintentionally and without the remotest conception of the meaning of his own words) the glorious ends that should be accomplished by the death of Christ^c; so Mary, though unconscious of it herself, predicted by this act the death and resurrection of her beloved Lord. It was common among the Jews to embalm the bodies of their departed friends: but there would be no time allowed for such tokens of respect from the friends of Jesus: for he would not be taken down from the cross till the Sabbath was nearly arrived; and on the Sabbath no such work could by the Jewish law be performed; and at the earliest dawn of the third day Jesus was to rise: Jesus therefore construed this action of Mary's as a preparation for his funeral, and as a performance of a rite, which could not otherwise have been performed at all.

^a John xi. 25, 26.

^b 1 Pet. i. 11.

^c John xi. 49—52.

all^d. This, we acknowledge, was not intended by herself; but it was designed and overruled by God; who by this significant emblem foreshewed the very events which in a few days were fully accomplished.]

Such was the act: let us next consider,

II. The commendation given it—

The Disciples blamed it as an act of extravagance and waste: and thinking lightly of the honour done to their Master, reflected only on the loss sustained by the poor; since if it had been sold and given to them, it would have provided relief for many^e. The person who first raised the objection was Judas, who, being a thief and carrying the bag, would have alienated the money to his own use. He being disappointed of his prey, pretended to feel for the poor; (for the worst of men will profess a regard for virtue, when their only object is to condemn and obstruct its exercise;) and the rest of the Apostles too readily adopted his views; so prone are even the best of men to adopt uncharitable sentiments, rather than be at the pains to make a full inquiry into the things which they condemn. But our blessed Lord, who knew the pious dispositions of her heart, proceeded,

1. To vindicate the act—

["She hath wrought a good work upon me," says our Lord. If acts of charity are not to be omitted, so neither are acts of piety. "The poor are always with us; and we have opportunities of doing them good at all times:" we may be, and *we ought to be*, in the daily habit of administering to their wants, and consulting their welfare. But there are occasions that call for particular exertions; occasions which have more especial respect to the glory of God, and the honour of the Lord Jesus; (such as the dispersion of the holy Scriptures, and the conversion of Jews and Gentiles to the faith of Christ;) and to these we should lend our aid with more than usual liberality, even though we should thereby contract our ability to relieve the temporal wants of men; for though we are certainly to do the latter, yet must we on no account leave the former undone. It is a very erroneous idea that our fellow-creatures only are to occupy our regard. Is
God

^d See the words immediately following the text.

^e It was worth about ten pounds of our money.

God to have no appropriate token of our love? Are the wonders of Redemption so insignificant, that they call for no expressions of gratitude on our part? So far are these considerations from deserving only a subordinate place in our esteem, that they should operate as the leading motive in all our exertions for the poor; and whatever we do, we should do it as "constrained by the love of Christ," and "with a view to his glory."]

2. To applaud the agent—

[Greater commendation could not be bestowed than that which is contained in our text; "She hath done what she could." An angel from heaven could in that respect have done no more. David's desire to build the temple, and his endeavour to make preparations for it, were as acceptable to God as the actual erection of it by Solomon. And the widow, who gave two mites, not only equalled, but far exceeded the liberality of the rich, though it is confessed that they cast in much into the treasury^f. And thus it is with us, whether we possess ten talents or only one, if only we labour to improve what we have, "it shall be accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not^g."]

Not content with applauding her at the moment, he ordained that this act of hers should be recorded in his Gospel, and continue to be held up to the admiration of mankind even to the end of the world^h. But was this memorial of her to be recorded solely for her honour? No: as the record, of Abraham's faith being counted to him for righteousness, *was* not made for his sake only, but for ours also, to whom a similar faith would be productive of similar benefitsⁱ, so this piety of Mary's was recorded, not for her sake only, but to *stimulate* and *encourage* us to an imitation of it.

It should *stimulate* us. We should consider that there is one great object which we should ever propose to ourselves through life; and that is, to serve and honour the Lord Jesus Christ. We should consider also that there is one only measure in which we should seek to effect that object; and that is, to the utmost extent of our ability. We should never think of what we *have done*, but of what we *can do*; nor account any thing done, whilst any thing remains to be done. Our daily and hourly inquiry should be, "What shall I render unto the Lord, for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" We should be as ingenious to devise plans of honouring him, as we should be diligent in the execution of them; and "whatever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with all our might."

Moreover,

^f Mark xii. 42—44.

^h ver. 9.

^g 2 Cor. viii. 12.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 22—25.

Moreover, it should *encourage* us. We are apt to think, that because we can do but little for the Lord, it is in vain to attempt any thing. But we are *in this respect* all upon a level: the poorest, the weakest, the meanest may do *what they can*; and the greatest of mankind can do no more. What an encouraging thought is this! how justly may it banish all those painful feelings which we are apt to indulge, and call forth into action every energy we possess! What though I cannot govern kingdoms for him, or go forth with Apostolic zeal to preach his Gospel? What though I have no wealth, no talent, no influence to cast into his treasury? I have my mite, and he will graciously accept it. I may give him at least the affections of my soul: and if I pour forth them in his house, or at his table, or in my secret chamber, he will smell as sweet an odour, as incense or sacrifice ever yet afforded him. If then we have nothing else to give him, let us *spiritually* adopt, as Mary did, the resolution of the Spouse in the Song of Solomon; "While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof^k."]

We would ADDRESS a few words,

1. To those who assume this character to themselves—

[Nothing is more common than to hear persons assert, that "they do all they can:" nay, many found on this very thing their hopes of acceptance with God. But this is dreadful presumption in any one, and more especially in those who are most forward to arrogate this character to themselves. Indeed the assumption of this character, whilst we found our hopes upon it, is a contradiction in terms: for to found our hopes upon any thing that we can do, is to exclude Christ from his office as a Saviour, and to dishonour him to the utmost of our power. Moreover, if those who look with such complacency on their own actions, would inquire, What exertions they have made to honour Christ, it is to be feared that a few unmeaning ceremonies, or actions that required neither self-denial nor zeal, would be found to constitute the whole of their boasted service. Let such persons then remember the caution given us by St. Paul, that "not he that commendeth himself is approved of God, but he whom the Lord commendeth^l."]

2. To those who are aspiring after it—

[Those who will be zealous for their Lord must expect discouragements, and that too, not only from the ungodly, who will be sure to put a bad construction on their actions, but even from many well-meaning, or even pious, persons, who

^k Cant. i. 12.

^l 2 Cor. x. 18.

who will misinterpret their designs.' If the very same occurrence were to take place at this very hour, under precisely the same circumstances, there are few of the Lord's disciples who would be able to appreciate it aright: few would have such an exalted view of Christ's dignity and glory, as to see that a concern for that ought to swallow up every other consideration. One would accuse her of extravagance, another of bold obtrusiveness; and the more favourable, who gave her credit for pious intentions, would blame her enthusiastic ardour and needless singularity. But, Beloved, be not discouraged by such things. I would not indeed recommend you to act in a way that should give unnecessary offence either to the world or to the Church of God: but on the other hand, I would not recommend you to have such respect to the opinions of men, as to moderate your exertions in the cause of Christ, to please them. What though Mary was condemned, not only by vile hypocrites, like Judas, but even by the Apostles themselves? Who does not envy her the approbation of her Lord? Who does not see in this memorial of her an ample recompence for the temporary obloquy that she sustained? And who that reflects on the reward that she is now receiving in heaven, does not see the blessedness of discarding the fear of man, and of living unto God? Let us then endeavour to approve ourselves to our all-seeing and ever-adorable Saviour. Let us guard against entertaining uncharitable thoughts either of those who fall short of us, or those who go beyond us, in acts of love to him. We all have our different views, different tempers, different tastes. Both Martha and Mary sought to honour him; the one in laborious service, the other in pious adoration; and both were accepted in what they did. Let us then "*do what we can*;" and strive to honour him in the way best suited to our capacities and talents: and, as he has poured out his soul unto death for us," let us be ready at all times to sacrifice for him our name, our property, our life.]

DCCXLVI.

PETER'S DENIAL OF HIS LORD.

Mark xiv. 71. *But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.*

THE Inspired Writers commend themselves and their writings to us, by their faithfulness in recording their own faults — — — If St. Mark wrote his Gospel,

Gospel, as many suppose, under the direction of Peter, we are constrained to admire the humility of Peter more especially: since his fall is narrated more strongly, and his repentance touched upon more slightly, by this, than by any other of the Sacred Historians. The aggravated circumstances of his conduct, which are mentioned in the text, serve in a very striking manner to shew us,

I. The folly of indulging self-confidence—

[Peter had been warned *generally*, (in common with the other Disciples) that he would forsake, and *particularly*, (in relation to himself,) that he would deny, his Lord. Conceiving it impossible that he should ever be guilty of such treachery, he protested that he would rather die with his Lord, than save his life by such base means. But, when he came to the trial, he fulfilled our Lord's predictions. He did not even profit by experience; for, when he had betrayed his cowardice in the first instance, he exposed himself to needless temptations by associating himself with the most inveterate enemies of his Lord. Had he gone to the High Priest's palace, to bear testimony to the character of Jesus, we must have commended his courage: but when he had no better object in view than the gratifying of his curiosity, we cannot but condemn his rashness and presumption. The consequence was such as might be expected: his courage failed him in the hour of trial; and he committed the very sins against which he had been warned.]

It is almost uniformly thus with ourselves, when we presume to rush into temptation, under the idea that we are strong enough to withstand its influence. Who amongst us has not found, that a needless intimacy with the ungodly has led him into an undue conformity to their habits and principles, and proved, in the issue, injurious to his soul? We have thought perhaps that we could maintain our integrity amongst them with ease and constancy, notwithstanding we have been expressly warned that "a Believer can have no fellowship with an Unbeliever," and that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." But the result of all our experiments has uniformly established that divine aphorism, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."]

In the conduct of Peter we may further see,

II. The danger of yielding to the fear of man—

[Peter was naturally of a bold intrepid spirit. But he was left on this occasion, that he might know his weakness,
and

and have a convincing evidence that his strength was in God alone. It is common indeed to represent his temptation as light; as though he had been intimidated by the voice of a servant maid. But whoever takes into the account all the circumstances that are related in the different Evangelists, will see, that he had abundant cause for fear; and that, if he had confessed his connexion with Jesus, he would most probably have participated his fate; more especially as it would soon be known, that he was the person who, but an hour or two before, had attempted to kill a servant of the High Priest. But his mind should have been fortified against the danger: He had been told, when first he became a follower of Jesus, that he must "forsake all," and "hate even his own life," in order to be approved as his disciple: and he had very recently professed his readiness to die in his Master's cause: he therefore should have now fulfilled his engagements, and shewn, that he had both counted the cost, and was willing to pay it. But his courage failed him; and he purchased a temporary peace at the expense of his honour, his conscience, and his soul.

It is justly said, that "the fear of man bringeth a snare." Perhaps it is itself one of the greatest snares that lie in our way to the kingdom of heaven. The profession of Christianity does not indeed expose us now to sufferings as it did in the Apostles' days: but a real love to the Gospel, and conformity to the Saviour's image, is as offensive now to an ungodly world, as it ever was: nor can any one become a sincere and zealous follower of Christ, without incurring much hatred, contempt, and obloquy. Nor is this easy for us to bear. A man who could face an enemy with undaunted courage, would not be able to face the sneers and ridicule of his pretended friends. And hence it is, that many, like Nicodemus of old, are ashamed and afraid to maintain an open connexion with the friends of Christ. Though they know in their hearts that Christ is the only source of spiritual and eternal life; and that they only who follow him in this world will enjoy him in the world to come; they are afraid to avow their principles, and ashamed to associate with the known adherents of Christ. But, if they so deny him in the presence of his enemies, he will surely deny them in the presence of his Father."]

We would, lastly, shew you from the text,

III. The extent to which we may go, when once we begin to fall—

[Peter began with dissembling (mixing with the servants, as if he had been perfectly like-minded with them), and then denied

denied his Lord, and at last confirmed that denial with the most horrid oaths and imprecations: yea, he denied that he even so much as knew the man. Who could ever have thought that Peter should have fallen thus low? But the downward road is very precipitous; and no one knows, when once he yields to sin, whither his evil dispositions will carry him. Sin makes a breach in the soul; and if means be not used at first to obstruct its progress, it will soon inundate the whole man. The example of Peter in the text is a standing memorial to the people of God, and a warning to them to resist the first motions of evil in their own bosoms. Judas began with petty thefts; and Demas with secret covetings; and David with wanton looks. If we profit not by their examples, the best that we can hope for will be, to be brought back to God with "broken bones;" and the probability is, that we shall come short of heaven at last, if not have a foretaste of hell in our bosoms, even while we are here. If we would maintain our integrity, we must not only flee from gross sin, but "hate even the garment spotted with the flesh."]

DCCXLVII.

CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO MARY MAGDALENE.

Mark xvi. 9. *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he cast seven devils.*

ON few subjects has the ingenuity of Critics been exercised more than in reconciling the accounts which the different Evangelists give respecting the appearances of Christ after his Resurrection. It is not to be wondered at, that, when such a great variety of occurrences are related in so small a space, some by one person, and others by another, some in a more concise, and others in a more detailed way, there should arise a difficulty in adjusting the precise order in which every fact arose. Cavillers indeed, and infidels have made this a matter of triumph; as if the existence of a difficulty in such a particular as this would invalidate the testimony of the inspired writers altogether. But we do not hesitate to say, that it confirms, rather than lessens, the credibility of their testimony; since it proves to a demonstration, that there

there was no concert between them, but that they related in the simplicity of their minds what they knew to be true, without inquiring whether, in recording a fact, the omission of a trifling circumstance might occasion some obscurity respecting the order or manner of its accomplishment. Leaving those smaller matters, we shall fix our attention on points of the first magnitude and importance: we shall,

I. Notice the manifestations which Jesus gave of himself after his resurrection from the dead—

His first appearance only is mentioned in the text: but it was so speedily followed by others, and their united effect is so important in establishing the truth of his Divine Mission, that we may well combine them together, and set them before you in a collective view.

They were,

1. Early—

[It was necessary that our Lord should rise on the third day after his crucifixion. Not only did the period of Jonah's deliverance from the belly of the fish determine the time of Christ's continuance in the grave^a, but it was expressly declared by David, that "God's Holy One should not see corruption^b," and consequently that he should rise from the dead before the fourth day, when bodies, in that hot climate, usually began to corrupt^c. Our Lord himself also had said, that, if they should "destroy the Temple of his body, he would in three days raise it up again^d:" And so frequently had he foretold that he would rise again on the *third* day, that the prediction was generally known among his enemies, and was indeed the ground of those very precautions which they used to guard the sepulchre, and thereby defeat any conspiracy amongst his followers^e. If then he had not risen on the third day, he would have been proved to be a deceiver: and if he had not made his appearance on that day, he would have given such occasion of triumph to his enemies as could scarcely ever have been removed. The absurd report that was circulated by the soldiers respecting his being stolen away while they were sleeping, would have been sanctioned, and the difficulty of removing that first impression would have been greatly increased. The Disciples

too,

^a Matt. xii. 40.

^b Ps. xvi. 10.

^c John xi. 39.

^d John ii. 19—21.

^e Matt. xxvii. 63—66.

too, who were already disconsolate, and, in their own apprehension, deceived, would have abandoned themselves wholly to despair. To prevent these evil consequences, our blessed Saviour manifested himself to Mary "early" on the morning of his resurrection; yea, at least five times on that very day did he make his appearance to different parties of his Disciples; first to Mary, then to the other women, then to Peter, then to two Disciples on their way to Emmaus, and then to the Eleven who were gathered together. Thus early were his triumphs proclaimed; and thus seasonably were his Disciples comforted!]

2. Numerous—

[We have already mentioned five appearances on the day of his resurrection. How many he vouchsafed to his Disciples afterwards, we cannot ascertain: for we are sure that they are not all recorded by the Evangelists. St. Paul mentions that Jesus was seen by James, and by five hundred brethren at once; neither of which appearances are particularly specified in the Gospels. We are told however, that "he was seen of the Disciples forty days;" which is a clear intimation that his intercourse with them was both frequent and familiar. Now in this he graciously condescended to our weakness. Had his manifestations of himself been very few, we might have been ready to fear that those who testified of his resurrection were either deceivers or deceived. Not even the Apostles themselves credited the appearance of their Master to Mary, or the other females: the very report was considered by them "as an idle tale." Much more therefore may we expect that his avowed enemies would have disbelieved it; and we at this distance of time should have had scarcely any foundation for our faith and hope. But the number of his appearances was such as to preclude a possibility of intentional collusion, or unintentional mistake.]

3. Indubitable—

[However numerous the appearances had been, if they had been all in dreams or visions, or to separate individuals, or at a distance, there would have been reason to doubt the truth and reality of them: but they were of the most satisfactory kind imaginable. Let it be granted, that Mary Magdalene, and the other women, and Peter, and the Disciples going to Emmaus, were deceived; and that the various conversations which they had with him were mere impositions on their eyes and ears; Were the Eleven deceived, when, notwithstanding the doors were shut, he presented himself in the midst of them, and bade them handle him (to see that he was not a mere Spirit, but had flesh and bones, like any other man),

man), and did eat and drink before them? Was the unbelieving Thomas deceived, when our Lord bade him put his fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into the wound that had been made in his side; and when, in consequence of the impossibility of resisting conviction any longer, he exclaimed, "My Lord, and my God?" Were the five hundred brethren, who saw him at once, deceived; or were they all in a conspiracy to deceive others? Were Peter and the rest deceived, when he told them on which side of the ship to cast their net, and then partook with them of the fish which they had caught? Were they deceived, when, after conversing with him a long time, his Disciples saw him ascend gradually from the midst of them, and taken up into heaven? Blessed be his name! he has taken care that so important a truth, on which all our hopes depend, should not rest on any doubtful testimony, but that it should be substantiated by proofs which cannot be denied without subverting all kinds of evidence, and all human testimony whatsoever.]

Let us now proceed to,

II. Inquire, Why he appeared first to Mary Magdalene in particular?

It is said of Mary Magdalene, that "he had cast seven devils out of her." And if she was, as she is generally supposed to be, that Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus in the Pharisee's house^f, she had been, not like the common demoniacs, a mere object of pity, but a vile, notorious, abandoned sinner. In this view, the mention of Jesus having cast seven devils out of her, gives singular importance to the text; and most forcible reasons may be assigned, why he appeared to her *first*, in preference to all other persons. He did so,

1. To display the exceeding riches of his grace—

[This was the chief design of God in that plan which he formed for the redemption of mankind^g. The same glorious design also may be seen in a variety of incidents, which, though apparently perhaps of small importance, are deserving of very attentive consideration. The command, for instance, respecting the publishing of the Gospel *first* in Jerusalem, where all ranks of people had so recently united in crucifying the Lord of glory^h, is a most astonishing display of grace and mercy: one would rather have thought that the Apostles should have been ordered to pass them by for ever, than to make

^f Luke vii. 36—38. ^g Eph. i. 6. & ii. 7. ^h Luke xxiv. 47.

make them the *first* offers of salvation. The instruments employed to propagate the Gospel, yet further illustrate this point. The person chosen to minister the Gospel to the Circumcision, and to convert thousands of them to the faith, was Peter, who had just before denied his Lord with oaths and curses. Yea, to him was such peculiar attention shewn, that he was selected by the angel, as the person to whom, above all others, the knowledge of our Saviour's resurrection was to be instantly conveyed¹. And our blessed Lord himself thrice renewed his call to the Apostleship, in the presence of the other Disciples, lest his past denial of his Lord should be construed as a renunciation of it, or a dismissal from it². In like manner, the person who was commissioned to go unto the Gentiles, was Saul, the persecutor; who was arrested in his murderous career, and made the most honoured, and most useful, of all the Apostles.

In the same light we view the preference shewn to Mary Magdalene above all others: In manifesting himself first of all to her, our Saviour may well be considered as declaring, That "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound!"³].

2. To reward her pious assiduity—

[Mary having purchased ointments and spices for the purpose of embalming our Lord's body, went early, while it was yet dark, to the sepulchre, to perform that last and mournful office. Though her prospects with respect to his establishing a temporal kingdom were altogether blasted, her regard for him was not in the least diminished. She was anxious to testify her respect in the only way that now remained to her: nor did any considerations of expense, or trouble, or danger, operate for a moment to impede her efforts. Such expressions of undissembled love could not escape the notice of an omniscient and gracious God. Our adorable Emmanuel would have accounted himself "unrighteous, if he could have overlooked such works and labours of love as she now shewed towards his name"⁴. It had long before been announced by him to the world, "Him that honoureth me, I will honour:" And now he fulfilled that word to this highly-favoured handmaid: nor will he ever suffer even a cup of cold water, given to a person for his sake, to lose its reward.]

3. To give encouragement to all future penitents to the end of time—

[The various events recorded in the Scriptures are not to be limited to the persons to whom they more immediately refer. Many judgments were inflicted, and many mercies vouchsafed,

¹ Mark xvi. 7.

² John xxi. 15—17.

³ Rom. v. 20.

⁴ Heb. vi. 10.

vouchsafed, for the benefit of the Church in future ages: and "they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." We read of pardon being revealed to David the very instant that he confessed his heinous crime: and the improvement which he himself makes of that stupendous mercy, is; "For this shall every one that is godly make his prayer unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found."ⁿ St. Paul also informs us of the "exceedingly abundant grace shewn to him;" and then adds, that he had been thus eminently distinguished by God for this reason; "that God might shew forth in him all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." For the same end, it should seem, was Mary Magdalene thus highly favoured. Persons, who are conscious of having committed enormous sins, are apt to think that they can never obtain mercy of the Lord: but our blessed Saviour would have them know, that "though our sins may have been as crimson, they shall be white as snow,"^{*} and that he is never more willing to feast with us upon the fatted calf, than on our first return from a dissolute and abandoned life.]

CONCLUSION—

[Behold, how effectually every ground of doubt is removed from us! Can we doubt Christ's *power and authority* to save? He has risen from the dead, and thereby given the most convincing evidence that he is ordained of God to be the Saviour of the world: and his numerous appearances to his Disciples after his resurrection preclude all possibility of deception. Can we doubt his *willingness* to save even the chief of sinners? This astonishing exercise of grace to one out of whom he had cast seven devils; forbids us to entertain the thought. Let all then trust in him as both *able* and *willing* to save them to the uttermost.]

ⁿ Ps. xxxii. 5, 6.

^{*} 1 Tim. i. 14, 16.

DCCXLVIII.

JOHN THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS.

Luke i. 17. *And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

THE Mosaic dispensation may be called, the age of prophecy; for under it was foretold every thing which should be accomplished to the end of time.

The

The nearer the prophets arrived to the commencement of the Christian æra, the more minute and circumstantial were their predictions respecting it. Other prophets had spoken largely of the Messiah; but Malachi, the last of them, points out his harbinger; and closes the prophetic Canon with announcing the Mission of one, who should prepare the world for his reception^a. Accordingly, about the time that Christ was to come, it was expected that Elijah, or at least some prophet like unto him, should first appear^b. Hence, when the angel was sent to Zacharias to inform him, that he in his old age should have a son, who was destined by God to the office of introducing the Messiah; he cited that very prophecy of Malachi, and cast the true light upon it: he told him, that this son of his should go before the Messiah *in the spirit and power* of Elias, and have the honour of announcing to the world the Messiah's advent.

Respecting this person, thus solemnly foretold, and thus miraculously born, we shall be led to notice two things;

I. His character—

It is in a comparative view that the text requires us to consider this:

He came “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” whom he closely resembled—

[The resemblance may be seen in *the endowments of their mind*^c — — — *the habits of their life*^d — — — *the exercise of their Ministry*^e — — —]

In this view, John is said to be “great in the sight of the Lord”—

[Such

^a Mal. iv. 5, 6.

^b Hence those questions put to the Baptist, John i. 21. and to our Lord, Matt. xvii. 10—13.

^c They were both men of eminent piety. Compare 1 Kin. xvii. 24. & Jam. v. 17. & 2 Kin. ii. 9, 11. with Luke i. 15. John v. 35. Matt. xi. 9, 11.

^d They were self-denied and dead to the world. Comp. 1 Kin. xvii. 3—6, 10. & 2 Kin. i. 8. with Matt. iii. 4. & Luke i. 80.

^e They were bold reprovers and successful reformers. Comp. 1 Kin. xviii. 17—40. and xxi. 19—24. & 2 Kin. i. 3, 4. with Luke iii. 7—9, 10—14, 16—18, 19. & Matt. xxi. 32.

[Such a character will not be admired amongst men: but with God it is in the highest estimation. We grant that, in some respects, it was not so much suited to us, as it was to John, and the particular office he sustained: but, for the most part, it was proper for every person in every age, and most of all for Ministers. It is proper that we be "filled with the Holy Ghost;" and if we be so "even from our mother's womb," happy are we. We ought also to shew a holy superiority to the world, to sit loose to its cares and pleasures, and to be regardless of its frowns or favours. We should dare to serve our God, even though the whole nation have departed from him: and bear our testimony against sin, by whomsoever it be committed. We should shew ourselves determinately on the Lord's side, and "shine as lights in a dark world."]

Suited to his august character was,

II. His office—

This was peculiar to himself; he alone of all the sons of men was appointed to be *the forerunner* of his Lord—

[It was customary for great personages to send messengers before them to prepare their way: and such a messenger was John the Baptist^f. It was highly proper that so glorious a person as the Messiah should not even appear to come in a surreptitious or clandestine manner; but that the minds of men should be directed to him, and his arrival be made the subject of general expectation. Hence we find, that the great argument by which John excited men to repentance, was this, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." He continually disclaimed all pretensions to the Messiahship himself, and directed them to One, who was speedily to arise among them, "whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to unloose." As the Messiah's harbinger, he strove to prepare the hearts of men for his reception. Men of all ages and descriptions were warned by him; and "fathers *with* their children were turned by him unto the Lord their God." The most "disobedient" among them "were converted by him to the wisdom of the just," even to that adorable Jesus, whom all the righteous love, and in the love of whom true wisdom consists. This was the end and aim of his whole Ministry, even to point men to that "Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world:" and, having succeeded in this according to his father's prediction^g, he was glad himself to "decrease," that "the Messiah might increase" and be glorified^h.]

^f Mal. iii. 1. with Matt. xi. 10, 14.

^h John iii. 30.

^g ver. 76, 77.

But

But similar to his, is the office of every Minister—

[The minds of the generality are as regardless of Christ as if he had never come into the world; they take his name indeed into their lips, but have no desire after his salvation in their hearts. Hence arises the necessity of crying to them continually, "Behold the Lamb of God," "behold him, behold him!" Him we must exalt as the only Saviour of the world; and account our lives well spent, if we be the favoured instruments of converting but a few to him — — —]

We cannot but OBSERVE from this subject,

1. How great a person Christ must be—

[From the preparations which were made for his reception, we are led to expect that he was possessed of more than human dignity: and accordingly we find him identified with Jehovah^k, and designated as the "Lord our God!" Yes: he was "Emmanuel, God with us," or, as he is elsewhere called, "the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ^m." While therefore we contemplate his advent, let us think of it with the profoundest admiration, and the most lively gratitude —]

2. How important must be the knowledge of him—

[The very end for which John was miraculously given to the world, was to bear witness to Christ, and to commend him to the Jewish nation. Was then the knowledge of Christ of such importance to the Jews? Surely it is no less so to us: our salvation depends upon it, as well as theirs: and therefore we should all ask ourselves, 'What think I of Christ? What am I the better for him? What hope have I in him? In him alone can we find acceptance, and "by him alone can we be justified." To him then let us direct our most assiduous attention, and "count all things but as dross, and dung" for the excellency of the knowledge of him.]

ⁱ Isai. lxxv. 1.

^k Compare Mal. iii. 1, with Matt. xi. 10,

^l ver. 16.

^m Tit. ii. 13.

DCCXLIX.

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE TO MARY.

Luke i. 35, 38. *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of*
of

of God . . . , And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.

AS none can tell what devices Satan is plotting for their ruin, or what snares he may bring them into; so none can tell what thoughts of peace and love God may have towards them, or what mercies he may speedily vouchsafe unto them. Little did the persecuting Saul think, when on his journey to Damascus, what God would do for him before he reached the place of his destination: and as little did the blessed Virgin imagine, when engaged in her domestic duties, what was in reserve for her, or what a single day should bring forth. The time fixed in the Divine counsels came at last, when the Messiah was to be brought into the world; and the Virgin Mother was to be informed of God's designs respecting her. Methinks, at the first address of the angelic messenger, she was filled with terror and surprise: but having been fully instructed respecting that peculiar favour which God had prepared for her, she acquiesced in the Divine proposals, and committed herself, with all her concerns, into the hands of her Almighty Friend.

We propose to consider,

I. The honour promised her—

She was informed, that God had ordained her to be the happy instrument of bringing into the world his only dear Son: and, on her inquiring how that should be accomplished in her virgin state, she was told that the Holy Ghost, who at the first creation of the world “moved upon the face of the waters,” and reduced the chaotic mass to order and beauty, should, by his almighty power, form in her that holy Being, who should, in his human as well as his Divine nature, be the Son of God.

But here a question arises, Why should the Messiah be born in this way? Why might not the privilege of bearing him be vouchsafed to her in a way more agreeable to the common course of nature?

We

We answer, That there was, if we may so speak, a necessity for it:

1. That he might not be involved in Adam's guilt—

[Adam was not a mere individual, but the head and representative of all his posterity; and, when he violated the covenant which God had made with him, he brought a curse, not on himself only, but on all his descendants also. This is evident from the death of infants, who cannot have contracted personal guilt, and yet suffer the punishment of sin. This could not be, if sin, in some shape or other, were not imputed to them. It is by "the transgression of Adam that they are accounted sinners, and that judgment comes upon them to condemnation^a." "In Adam all died^b."

Now if the Lord Jesus had descended from him in the common way, he would have lien under the same sentence of condemnation with others, and therefore would have needed a deliverer himself, instead of becoming a deliverer to others.]

2. That he might not partake of Adam's corruption—

[When Adam fell, he became corrupt in every member of his body, and in every faculty of his soul. And we are particularly informed, that "he begat a son in *his own* likeness," not in the likeness of God in which he was created, but in his own image as a fallen creature. An awful evidence of this truth he soon beheld, in Cain's hatred, and murder, of righteous Abel.

Of this corruption Christ must have participated, if he had been born in the way of other men: for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one^c," says Job: and again, "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" In this case, he could not have been "a Lamb without spot or blemish;" and consequently, not a proper sacrifice for sin. He must be without sin himself, if he is to take away the sins of others^e; and "offer himself without spot to God," if he is to purge away the guilt of a ruined world^f.]

3. That the Scriptures might be fulfilled in him—

[The very first promise which announced his future birth, designated him as exclusively "the Seed of the woman^g." We might not perhaps have so limited the import of that passage, if subsequent prophecies had not thrown the true light upon it: but Isaiah expressly says, that "a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Emma-

^a Rom. v. 12—19.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^c Job xiv. 4.

^d Job xxv. 4.

^e 1 John iii. 5.

^f Heb. ix. 14.

^g Gen. iii. 15.

Emmanuel^b;" and an inspired Apostle assures us, that this Scripture had an exact and literal accomplishment in the birth of Jesusⁱ. The prophet Jeremiah also, encouraging the Jews to return to their native land, tells them, that "God would create a new thing there, namely, A woman should compass a man^k;" that is, should bear a man-child in her virgin state, which had never taken place from the foundation of the world, and which would in a peculiar manner require the exercise of his all-creating power.

Now the Scriptures cannot be broken: if therefore Jesus was to be the Messiah spoken of in the Prophets, he must be born in this very manner; and the honour of bearing him must be enjoyed in this way alone.]

From the conferring the honour, we are naturally led to consider,

II. Her acceptance of it—

Here, while we behold her virgin modesty, unalloyed with any mixture of pride or boasting, we are of necessity called to admire,

1. Her faith in the promise—

[When Zacharias, an aged and pious priest, had been informed by the angel that he should have a son in his old age, he doubted the truth of it, and required a sign for the confirmation of his faith^l: but when this holy Virgin was told of a thing far less credible, she doubted not one single moment: her question was, not for the assuring of her mind about the truth of the promise, but merely for information respecting the mode of its accomplishment. Now in this she shewed the eminence of her piety: and for this she was particularly commended by God himself, who inspired Elizabeth; at the first appearance of the Virgin, to exclaim, "Blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord^m." It was such an exercise of faith that made Abraham so distinguished among all the sons of men, and so eminently beloved of his Godⁿ. This also was the grace which most particularly characterized all the saints of old^o; which also our blessed Lord invariably honoured with his peculiar approbation; which therefore should exalt his virgin mother exceeding highly in our esteem.]

2. Her submission to the appointment—

[She could not but know that the honour proposed for

^b Isai. vii. 14.

ⁱ Matt. i. 22, 23.

^k Jer. xxxi. 22.

^l ver. 18—20.

^m ver. 45.

ⁿ Rom. iv. 3, 13, 18—22.

^o Heb. xi.

for her acceptance might entirely ruin her character, and possibly even affect her life: for God himself had commanded, that a virgin betrothed should, if unfaithful to her engagements, be punished with death, exactly as she would have been if actually married^p. On these grounds she might well have suggested doubts, and inquired, how she should be protected from these awful consequences. But she felt no doubt, but that He, whose power and love could confer upon her the proposed honour, would exercise a watchful care over her, and either entirely prevent, or richly recompense, these dreaded evils. Like "Abraham, who at the call of God went out, not knowing whither he went," she cheerfully committed herself to the Divine protection, knowing in whom she had believed, and assured that he would never leave her nor forsake her. That there was just ground for such fears, appears by the very purpose which Joseph formed, of putting her away as an adulteress: and which was only prevented by the intervention of God himself, who sent an angel to inform him by what means she was pregnant, and to commend her to his peculiar care.

Here again we cannot but admire that resignation and fortitude, whereby she rose superior to all those fears and apprehensions, which such a situation was calculated to inspire.]

3. Her gratitude for the favour—

[At the first, as we might expect, her frame was that of meek and humble submission. But, when she had had time to reflect upon the greatness of the mercy vouchsafed unto her, and the blessings which would come upon the world by her means, she broke forth into the most exalted strains of praise: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my Spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." She justly acknowledged, that "He who was mighty had done to her great things," in the contemplation of which "all generations would call her blessed." She viewed with ineffable delight the accomplishment of that promise which had been made to Abraham; and doubtless, to the latest moment of her life, adored that God, who had made use of her as his honoured instrument to fulfil it.]

In the review of this mysterious subject, we may

LEARN,

1. How God fulfils his promises—

[The difficulty here seemed insurmountable: the Son of God, in order "to redeem them that were under the Law, must be made under the Law," yet not really obnoxious to its curse,

^p Deut. xxii. 23, 24.

curse, and be "made of a woman," subject to all the infirmities of our nature, and yet be free from sin^a. But God is never at a loss: "with him nothing is impossible:" he devised and executed a plan, whereby we might have "such an High Priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners;" a plan, that filled all heaven with wonder. Thus, in other dispensations of his providence and grace, he often permits difficulties to arise, which preclude all hope of our attaining the object of our desire. But, in the best and fittest season, he interposes; and "makes light to arise in obscurity, and our darkness to be as the noon-day." At this hour, as much as in the days of Abraham, is that saying true, "In the Mount the Lord shall be seen."]

2. How we ought to receive them—

[Amongst the many promises which God has given us, there is one "exceeding great and precious," not unlike to that which has been the subject of our present consideration; namely, that "Christ shall be formed in our hearts"; that being so formed, he "shall dwell in us"; and that so dwelling in us, he shall be to us "the hope of glory." This promise is even greater than that which was fulfilled to the blessed Virgin, inasmuch as a spiritual union with the Lord exceeds that which is merely carnal^a. And how should we receive this promise? I answer, Precisely as the blessed Virgin did. We should not stagger at it through unbelief: we should not account it too *good* for his love to grant, or too *great* for his power to execute. We should be alike unmoved by either the difficulties that may obstruct its accomplishment, or the dangers that may follow it. Our reputation, our interests, our life, we should commit to the hands of a faithful Creator, equally ready to suffer for him, or to be more illustrious monuments of his paternal care. O happy should we be, if in this manner we could embrace every promise he has given us, and in full expectation of its accomplishment say, "Behold the servant of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word."]

^a Gal. iv. 4, 5. Heb. ii. 17. & iv. 15.

^b Heb. vii. 26.

^c Gal. iv. 19. ^d Eph. iii. 17. ^e Col. i. 27. ^f Luke xi. 27, 28.

DCCL.

THE VIRGIN'S SONG OF PRAISE.

Luke, i. 46, 47. *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

THE characteristic features of the unregenerate man, are pride and selfishness. If the distinctions of others are superior to his own, he regards them with envy; if inferior, with contempt. The reverse of this is universally produced by the grace of God. That teaches us to "seek not our own things only, but also the things of others;" and to "prefer others in honour before ourselves:" being ready at all times to acknowledge and commend what is good in them, and to give God the glory of whatever good there may be in us. Nowhere will this be found more beautifully exemplified than in the interview which took place between Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary. Immediately after the blessed Virgin had been informed of God's gracious design respecting her, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who had, by the immediate influence of Heaven, been enabled to conceive a son in her old age. On her very first appearance, Elizabeth, neither elated with her own honour, nor envious of Mary's, broke forth into the warmest congratulations; losing all sight, as it were, of her own mercies, and rejoicing altogether in those which had been vouchsafed to her pious friend. The Virgin too, in her reply, shewed clearly on what her mind was fixed, and what was the main desire of her heart. Not a single word savouring of self-exaltation, escaped her lips: but with devoutest gratitude she ascribed unto God the honour due unto his name.

In considering these first effusions of her soul, it will be proper to notice,

I. The grounds of her joy—

[Doubtless she had some respect to the peculiar mercy vouchsafed to her^a: nor could she without base ingratitude have overlooked it. But it is evident that her views were directed to "God" himself, as the Benefactor, the "Saviour," of mankind.

If we consider God *the Father* as the object in whom she rejoiced, still it was in him *as sending his Son into the world*, and by him reconciling the world unto himself. It was in him also as *her Saviour*. Here then we see her sentiments in relation to the state of her soul before God. Holy as she was, she

^a ver. 48, 49.

she saw herself a sinner before God, and justly obnoxious to his everlasting displeasure. She was convinced also that she could not by any means make atonement for her sins, or reconcile herself to God. She felt that she needed a Saviour as much as the vilest of the human race: and she looked for salvation solely as the gift of God through the merits of her Redeemer.

Were such *her* views? what ought to be *ours*? what should be our estimate of *our own* state? How vain must be that conceit, which the more chaste and sober amongst us are prone to indulge, that they do not deserve the wrath of God; or that they shall find acceptance with God because of their *comparative* goodness!

If we consider *the Lord Jesus Christ* as the object of her joy, (which we may well do,) then do we see what her views were of that Child, whom she was in due time to bring into the world. "David, in and by the Spirit, had called him Lord," at the time that he spoke of him as his Son, who should in due time arise to sit upon his throne^b. And Elizabeth had directly acknowledged that holy Being that was but just formed in the Virgin's womb, as "*her Lord*;" and had declared that the infant in her own womb had leaped for joy at his approach^c. The Virgin herself too knew his Divine origin, and that he was "*the Son of the Highest*." Well therefore might she "*magnify*" him for his astonishing condescension, and "*rejoice in*" him as her deliverer from the wrath to come. It is probable enough that her views of his work and offices were much less distinct than ours: but, whether more or less clear, they were manifestly the ground of her joy. She knew that he was sent to be the Saviour of the world; and she had no doubt but that he would "*finish the work which God had given him to do*."

And have not we the same ground of joy^d? or rather, Ought not our joy in him to be more sublime, in proportion as our knowledge of him is more clear? O let not our views of him be less exalted, or our affiance in him less firm!— — —]

From viewing the grounds of her joy, let us turn our attention to,

II. The expressions of it—

[Here we behold a blessed mixture of *admiration*, *gratitude*, and *joy*. It is evident that her mind was full of her subject: the abruptness of her speech shews, that she had "*mused in her heart till the fire kindled*; and then she spoke with her tongue." She was naturally of a ruminating thoughtful turn^e: and, from the moment when the angel announced

to

^b Compare Ps. cx. 1. with Matt. xxii. 43—45.

^c ver. 43, 44.

^d Luke, ii. 10, 11.

^e Luke i. 29. & ii. 19, 51.

to her the Divine purpose, we doubt not but that her meditations had been on this subject night and day. Here then, overwhelmed, as it were, with the greatness of this mystery, she gives vent to her feelings, and magnifies him as her Saviour, whom by faith alone she knew to have been formed in her womb.

Fain would she have presented to her God a tribute of praise adequate to the occasion. Her soul and spirit "were engaged to the uttermost:" but the language of mortality was too feeble for such a theme. Yet, as far as she could, she "magnified" her Lord, and rendered to him the acknowledgments so justly due.

As to the joy she felt, that also, no less than her theme, exceeded the powers of language to express. Even if she could have expressed it, her words would not convey to us any precise ideas, unless we had correspondent feelings within our own bosom.

If such then was her state, we ask, What can any man know of this mystery, who has not been filled with wonder at it? What can any man know of it, who does not rejoice in it with most exalted joy, and bless God for it from his inmost soul? — — — As a speculative truth indeed, it may have received our assent, even though we have never contemplated it with any suitable emotions: but if the excellency of the truth have been ever felt, we have found that we sunk under it as ineffable, incomprehensible; and were constrained to adore in silence the mercies which we could not utter — — —]

From this instructive history we may LEARN,

1. Our duty—

[Persons readily acknowledge their obligation to do as they would be done unto, or even to perform some religious duties: but they can live all their days without rejoicing in God, and yet never feel any sense of guilt on account of it. But are not the commands on this head as clear, and as forcible, as on any subject whatever? "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice^f;" "Rejoice evermore, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you^g." Indeed the exercise of this heavenly disposition is represented as characteristic of the true Christian, insomuch that no person can claim that honourable appellation, who is a stranger to it: "We are the circumcision, who rejoice in Christ Jesus^h." Let not any then imagine that they are in a state acceptable to God, while they continue to have such low thoughts of the Saviour, and are so insensible to all the wonders of redeeming love — — —]

2. Our

^f Phil. iv. 4.

^g 1 Thess. v. 16, 18.

^h Phil. iii. 3.

2. Our privilege—

[We are almost ashamed to have spoken of joy in Christ under the name of *duty*. What would a glorified saint feel, if exhorted to it as a *duty*? He would spurn at the idea: he would say, "It is not my *duty*, but my *privilege*: it constitutes the very happiness of heaven." O that we could learn to think of it in that view! It is in this very light that St. Peter speaks of it, not as an object to be desired, but as an attainment common to the saints: "Believing in Christ," says he, "ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified¹." Look at the Psalmist, and behold his state: he determined to praise his God with every faculty of his soul^k, and every member of his body^l, if we may so speak; and to spend every day, (I had almost said, every hour,) to the end of life, in this blessed employment^m. Let us imitate his example. "Let *them* give thanks, whom the Lord hath redeemed:" if *we* do not, "the very stones will cry out against us." We are not advocates for enthusiasm: but if to resemble the holy Virgin, to be filled with admiring thoughts of the Saviour, and to anticipate the felicity of heaven, be enthusiasm, let us be enthusiasts: such enthusiasts will God approve. Yet, that we give no just occasion for that reproach, let us combine discretion with devotion; according to the exhortation of the Psalmist, "Sing praises to the Lord, sing praises; sing praises to the Lord, sing praises; sing ye praises *with understanding*ⁿ."]

¹ 1 Pet. i. 8.^k Ps. ciii. 1, 2.^l Ps. xxxv. 9, 10. "My soul — — — yea, *all my bones* shall say, &c."^m Ps. cxlv. 1, 2. & cxlvi. 1, 2. & cxix. 164. & ib. 62.ⁿ Ps. xlvii. 6, 7.

DCCLI.

THE SONG OF ZACHARIAS.

Luke i. 67—75. *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people; and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy Prophets which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us: to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.*

CONSIDERING the depth of humiliation to

which the Son of God was about to submit, in taking upon him our nature, it was necessary that his birth should be attended with such circumstances, as were calculated to impress the minds of men with a conviction of his real character. Accordingly we find, that, previous to his birth, there was ample testimony given to him as a most extraordinary personage, such as the world had never before seen. A person was sent “to prepare his way before him :” and this forerunner was himself distinguished by a preter-natural birth. The father of this messenger was informed by an angel, that his aged, and hitherto barren, wife should conceive a son, who should be called John. On his expressing some doubt of the angel’s veracity, he was struck dumb for his unbelief; and continued so till the birth and naming of the promised child: and then, on his confirming the appointment of his wife respecting the name of the child, his tongue was loosed, and he brake forth into this prophetic hymn of praise; in which he blesses God for the advent of the Messiah,

I. As an accomplishment of prophecy—

The incarnation of the Son of God had been foretold from the beginning of the world—

[It was announced to Adam immediately after his fall ^a. To Abraham it had been promised with an oath ^b. To David, from whose loins the Messiah was to spring, it had been confirmed by an everlasting covenant ^c.

In a more particular manner it had been foretold that Christ should “*visit* and *redeem*” his people. The state of the Israelites in Egypt, and their redemption from thence, had been foreordained from the beginning, in order to typify this great event. Abraham was warned of the afflictions which his posterity should endure there, and of the wonderful deliverance which at a remote period they should experience ^d. Joseph in his dying hour assured his brethren, that God would “*visit* them,” and bring them thence ^e. And Moses was in due time sent upon this errand, and commissioned to inform his wretched countrymen, that God was come at last
to

^a Gen. iii. 15.

^b Gen. xxii. 16—18.

^c Ps. lxxxix. 3, 4; 34, 35, 36. & cxxxii. 11, 17, 18.

^d Gen. xv. 13, 14. with Acts vii. 6, 7.

^e Gen. l. 24, 25.

to *visit* and deliver them^f. Now in the text, there is, as in the sequel will more fully appear, a reference, not to the event merely, but to the very terms in which that event was predicted: from which circumstance, the typical application of that history to the incarnation of Christ, is clearly warranted and confirmed.]

For the accomplishment of this great event, this holy man blessed and adored his God—

[The prospect of this event had excited a lively joy in the breast of Abraham, at the distance of two thousand years^g: and all who, in the intermediate space, had successively believed the promises, had lived and died in the pleasing expectation, that the happiness denied to them should be granted to their posterity^h. When the time for the Messiah's advent drew nigh, the expectation of him became more generalⁱ, more joyful, more assured. Many there were who "looked for redemption in Jerusalem^k," and "waited for Jesus as the Consolation of Israel^l." What wonder then that, on the sight of his forerunner, Zacharias burst forth in these triumphant strains? What wonder that, in the confidence of faith, he spake of the Saviour as already arrived, yea, and the work of Redemption as already effected by him, though there were yet several months to elapse before he would be born into the world? It was surely the fittest use of his newly-recovered speech; and had he forborne to use it thus, "the very stones would have cried out against him."]

But the incarnation of Christ was a ground of joy to him :

II. As a mean of spiritual blessings—

Here the reference to the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt is yet more manifest than before. The requisition made by Moses to Pharaoh was, that Israel should go into the wilderness to serve the Lord. This was the ground of contest between them^m; till at last God, by his terrible judgments on the Egyptians, decided the point. But, after that the Israelites were brought forth to the very borders of the Red Sea, they were menaced with utter destruction by Pharaoh and all his host. The overwhelming of that army in the sea completed the deliv-

rance

^f Exod. iii. 16, 17.

^g John viii. 56.

^h Heb. xi. 13.

ⁱ John iv. 25.

^k Luke ii. 38.

^l Luke ii. 25.

^m Exod. v. 1—3.

rance of his people, so that they could from that moment serve the Lord without any fear of their antient-oppressors.

The redemption wrought out by Christ, is in perfect correspondence with this. By his advent we obtain,

1. Deliverance from our spiritual enemies—

[We are in the hand of enemies more cruel and tyrannical than those of Egypt; we are in bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell. From these our blessed Lord delivers us^a. By the blood of his cross he expiates sin, overcomes Satan, destroys death, and liberates from the jaws of hell. He is “an horn of salvation” to his people, a mighty and irresistible Saviour, who will push down all his enemies. None can detain us any longer in bondage, when he comes to set us free: “if he make us free, then are we free indeed^b.”]

2. Liberty to serve our God—

[Deliverance from the punishment of sin would be unworthy the name of a deliverance, if it were not accompanied with a restoration to the Divine favour, and a thorough renovation of heart and life. As long as we were destitute of holiness, we must of necessity be strangers to happiness. Heaven itself would be no heaven to an unholy soul. But Jesus “redeems us from all iniquity, and purifies us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works^c.” He causes us to delight ourselves in God; and to “serve him without fear.” In this respect we far exceed all who lived under the Jewish dispensation: for *they* were kept at a distance from God; and the very services which they rendered to him, tended to generate in them a servile fear^d? But *we* “have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father^e.”]

Can it be doubted whether these things deserve our grateful acknowledgments? If the state to which the Israelites were brought in the Wilderness or in Canaan, was a just ground of praise and thanksgiving, is not ours much rather?]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us bless God for the event we this day commemorate^f—

[The Saviour's birth was proclaimed by angels as “glad tidings

^a This is twice mentioned in the text.

^b John viii. 36.

^c Tit. ii. 14.

^d Heb. xii. 18—21.

^e ib. ver. 22—24. with Rom. viii. 15.

^f This Sermon was preached on Christmas-day.

tidings of great joy to all people;" and the heavenly hosts themselves began a new song in heaven, "Glory to God in the highest." The Virgin who bare him, the Patriarch who took him in his arms, the Prophetess who beheld him, together with many others, rejoiced exceedingly in his advent, notwithstanding they had such imperfect views of his character. Shall not *we* then; we who have had his nature and office so fully revealed to us; we who have seen him dying, rising, ascending, and enthroned; we who have beheld him sending down the Holy Ghost from heaven, and saving myriads of sinners like ourselves; yea, we who have experienced his power to save, (if we have indeed experienced it,) shall not *we* praise him? Yes; blessed, "blessed be his name for visiting and redeeming" our souls; "blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen."']

2. Let us seek to participate the blessings accruing from it—

[Though we are not properly affected with our spiritual bondage, because we are in love with our chains, yet is it far more terrible than any to which our bodies can be subject. Now we are well assured, that if heavy tasks were daily imposed on us, and we were constantly beaten for not executing what it was not in our power to perform, we should not unfrequently pour out our complaints before God, and cry to him to avenge our cause¹. What stupor then has seized us, that, in a situation incomparably more lamentable, we do not embrace deliverance when it is offered? Let us not be satisfied with captivity, when Christ is "proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound²." Let us not "thrust him away from us³," when he is come to visit us: but let us welcome him into our hearts, as well as into the world, and never rest till "we know him in the power of his resurrection, in the fellowship of his sufferings, and in a conformity to him" both in holiness and in glory⁴.]

¹ Ps. lxxii. 18, 19.

² Exod. v. 14—16.

³ Isai. lxi. 1.

⁴ Acts vii. 27, 39.

⁵ Phil. iii. 10.

DCCLII.

CHRIST'S INCARNATION GLAD TIDINGS TO ALL.

Luke ii. 10, 11. *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day,*

day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

IT has pleased God on many occasions to confer upon the poor some peculiar tokens of his regard: he has even "chosen them," in preference to all others, "to be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom." But, as though he had designed to mark with special approbation the exertions of honest industry, he has vouchsafed his most distinguished favours to them at a time when they have been employed in the duties of their respective callings. Gideon, "who was of a poor family of Manasseh, and the least in his father's house," was threshing his father's wheat, when he was called to judge and to deliver Israel^a. Saul, who also was "of the least family belonging to the least of all the tribes," was seeking his father's asses, when he was anointed to be king over Israel^b. David also, the least of Jesse's family, was brought from the sheepfold, that, from tending his father's sheep, he might be exalted to the throne, and be made the shepherd, and king, of God's peculiar people^c. Thus, when God had sent his dear Son into the world, he commissioned an angel to announce the tidings of his advent. But to whom did he send the angel? to Herod, or the Chief Priests? No: but to poor shepherds, who, for the security of their sheep, and their own mutual convenience, were keeping their watches, in rotation, through the night^d. To fix their attention, and to counteract the scandal which the tidings themselves would occasion, (for it must seem strange indeed to hear of the Saviour of the world, and the Lord of Glory, lying in a manger,) the angel appeared clothed with light, such light as clearly indicated the dignity of the messenger, and the importance of the message. Having dispelled the fears which his first appearance had excited in their minds, he addressed them in the words

^a Judg. vi. 11, 15.

^b 1 Sam. ix. 3, 20, 21.

^c Ps. lxxviii. 70, 71. with 1 Sam. xvi. 11.

^d φυλάσσοντες φυλακὰς τῆς νυκτὸς, *Keeping (by turns) the watches of the night* ver. 8.

words which we have just read : in elucidating which, we shall consider,

I. The tidings announced—

The birth of Jesus is, here declared : and the city wherein he was born is specified in appropriate terms, in order that the accomplishment of that prophecy which had foretold the place of his birth might be distinctly seen and acknowledged*. The description here given of Jesus is worthy of our deepest attention. The angel describes him by,

1. His office—

[Many Saviours had been sent to Israel in former ages^f: but here was one infinitely superior to them all; one who came to deliver, not one people only, but a whole world; not from temporal bondage or misery, but from sin and Satan, death and hell — — —]

2. His right and title to it—

[The name "Christ," as also the name "Messiah," signifies 'Anointed:' and it was the name by which the great Deliverer was expected both by the Jewish and Gentile world^g. Now this name denoted his Divine commission, together with his super-eminent qualifications for the performance of his office. The kings and priests, and, in some instances, the prophets also, were set apart for their respective offices by a holy unction. And he, in whom all these offices were combined, was consecrated to them by a public and immeasurable effusion of the Holy Ghost^h. He was no unauthorized obtruder; but a Saviour, duly sent, and qualified.]

3. His sufficiency for it—

[Had the person announced as a Saviour been a mere creature, he never could have effected all that was necessary for those whom he came to save. But he was "the Lord," even Jehovah himself. It had been said of him by the prophet, eight hundred years before, "To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and his name shall be called, The Mighty Godⁱ:" and that prophecy was declared to be now accomplished. Consequently, whatever he had undertaken, he was able to perform: his atonement would be sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world: his righteousness would be sufficient to justify all that should trust in it for acceptance: and his

* Mic. v. 2.

^f Nch. ix. 27.

^g John iv. 25. It was not a Jewess, but a Samaritan, that said this.

^h Luke iii. 22. & iv. 18. with Ps. xlv. 7. & John iii. 34.

ⁱ Isai. ix. 6.

his grace would be sufficient to make them conquerors over all their enemies.]

Together with the tidings themselves, the angel announced also,

II. The importance of them—

The term, “behold,” is always used to mark the importance of that to which it is prefixed. But here the precise view in which the tidings claim our attention is distinctly specified. They are a matter,

1. Of exceeding joy—

[To illustrate this, we need only observe *by whom* the message was delivered, and *to whom*. An angel was the messenger: but he was not privileged to say, “To us is born a Saviour:” no; there was no Saviour provided for the fallen angels: but for man, when *he* fell, God became incarnate: “he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the Seed of Abraham^k.” Suppose then, that instead of being sent to *men*, the angel had been sent to his fallen brethren; and that, having opened the gates of hell, he had announced the tidings to the apostate Spirits, “To you is sent a Saviour!” O what joy had been diffused through those miserable regions! How would the vaults of hell have rung with acclamations and hosannas! How would every spirit instantly have forgotten his pains, and pressed forward to hear the full import of this astonishing message! Thus then ought the tidings to be received amongst us: since the only difference between them and us is, that on *them* is executed the sentence they deserve, and *we* are shut up in prison, waiting to have the same executed upon us, as soon as the full measure of our iniquities shall be completed.]

2. Of universal joy—

[These tidings were equally interesting to Jews and Gentiles; to those of the Apostolic age, and to us who live at such a distance, both of time and place. Nor is there one among the Children of men who has not equal cause to value the Saviour that is here announced. *Who is there that does not need* the merit of his atonement and the efficacy of his grace? *And who is there to whom they are not freely offered?* There is not one on earth who can be saved without them; nor is there one, however abandoned, who may not, by a believing application to the Saviour, be interested in them. Well therefore may they be called good tidings “to all people;” since they are so to all, of every age, and of every description;

^k Heb. ii. 16.

description: and well may the Prophet call on the whole creation to shout for joy^b.]

We CONCLUDE with inviting you all to imitate the shepherds.

1. Inquire into the truth of the tidings you have heard—

[The shepherds instantly went to Bethlehem, to see with their own eyes the truth of what they had heard^m. To you then we say, "Go to Bethlehem," or rather, Go to the Bible, and search whether these things be not as they have been represented? What would you have thought of the shepherds, if, when they had such an opportunity of obtaining satisfaction on the point, they had neglected it, and had laid themselves down to sleep? O be not ye such yourselves. You have incomparably better means of information than they had. You may see the whole record concerning this holy Child; his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension; yea, you may see the union of the Godhead with his human-nature, and may read, in facts as well as in declarations, his ability to save you to the uttermost. O arise, and inquire into these deep mysteries, with all the humility and attention they demand.]

2. When convinced of the truth of them yourselves, communicate them diligently to others—

[The shepherds would not hide within their own bosoms the things they had heard and seen, but published them abroad for the information of others alsoⁿ. And should you be silent? When you have so much clearer instruction to convey, should you not impart it gladly to those around you? Remember, that if you have the knowledge of Christ as the only and all-sufficient Saviour, you are on no account to put that light under a bushel, but to make use of it that you may guide others also into the way of peace.]

3. Make them the theme of your joyful praises in the midst of your earthly business—

["The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen^o:" they forsook not their duty: but returned to it in a joyful and devout frame of mind. A discovery of the deep things of God is not intended to take us out of the situations in life which we have been called to fill; but to make us holy, and happy in them. Let this effect be wrought on you. Neglect not your worldly

¹ Isai. xliv. 23.

ⁿ ver. 17.

^m ver. 15.

^o ver. 20.

worldly occupations, whatever they may be; but serve God in them, and abound in praises and thanksgivings for that which has been revealed unto you. However mean or toilsome your vocation be, care not for it; but make it to appear, that the knowledge of this Saviour can render any yoke easy, and afford a joy which the world can neither give nor take away.]

DCCLIII.

INQUIRY INTO THE GOSPEL RECOMMENDED.

Luke ii. 15. *Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*

IT is a rich mercy to have a faithful instructor, who will declare unto us the whole counsel of God. But, to obtain any solid benefit, we must search into the truths we hear, and endeavour to get a deep impression of them upon our minds. Without care and diligence on our parts, it would be to little purpose to enjoy the Ministry of Paul himself, or even of angels from heaven. What would the shepherds have been profited by the tidings which the angels announced to them respecting the Saviour's birth, if, like too many amongst us, they had contented themselves, with admiring the eloquence of the chief speaker, or the sweetness and melody of the hymn they sang? They set us a good example: they thought not of amusement, but of edification; not of the manner in which the messengers performed their part, but of the truths delivered by them: and no sooner had their heavenly instructors left them to themselves, than they proposed to go immediately and examine into the things which had been made known unto them.

From this striking incident we shall take occasion to set before you,

I. The event referred to—

In the preceding context we are informed what the tidings were, which were brought by the angels—

[These tidings were, *that a Saviour was that very day born into the world.* A general expectation prevailed among the

the Jews, that about that time a person of most extraordinary character should be born in their land, and should become a Saviour to the Jewish people. Very erroneous notions indeed obtained respecting the nature of the benefits which he would impart to them: but the more enlightened persons among them extended their views beyond a mere temporal deliverance, and looked forward to spiritual and eternal blessings. The advent of this person was now proclaimed to the shepherds; and it was declared, that the Child was born "in the city of David, as the Prophets had foretold^a; and, that not the Jews only, but "all the nations" of the earth, were interested in the salyation which he was come to effect.

* The tidings yet further intimated, *that the new-born infant was none other than "the Lord of Glory."* It was no common child whose birth was announced: though he partook of flesh and blood, yet was he possessed of a nature infinitely superior to that of men or angels. The shepherds were informed that "the Child which was born, and the Son that was given, was," as Isaiah had foretold, "the Mighty God^b," even "Emmanuel, God with us^c." As the salvation which he was to accomplish was to be extended to all people, so he was fitted for his work, being the omnipotent Jehovah, who could not fail of success in whatever he undertook.

Lastly, it was declared, *that, notwithstanding the dignity of his person, and the greatness of his office, he was to be found in a state of the deepest humiliation.* It was not in the palaces of Herod or the High Priest, or in the mansions of the great and noble, that this Child was to be found: no; they must go and look for him in the stable of an inn; and they would "find him wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger," like one that was ordained to be "a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people^d."]]

The same tidings are announced to us at this day—

[No angels are now sent, or need to be sent, on such messages, because the Scriptures give us all the information that we can desire. But Ministers are Ambassadors from God; and are commissioned from God to declare the same joyful tidings as were conveyed to the shepherds by the heavenly hosts. We then make known to you, that that very Jesus, who once lay in the womb of the blessed Virgin, and who, at his birth had no other mansion than a stable, no other cradle than a manger, that same Jesus, I say, was "God manifest in the flesh^e," even "God over all blessed for ever^f." We moreover declare unto you, that he is "the Saviour of the world," and that "there is

^a Mic. v. 2.

^b Isai. ix. 6.

^c Isai. vii. 14.

^d Ps. xxii. 6.

^e 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^f Rom. ix. 5.

is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ^a."]

From the regard which the shepherds paid to this event, we proceed to shew you,

II. The inquiries to be made concerning it—

No message that comes from God ought to be treated with contempt; much less should one that is of such mysterious import, such universal concern.

Inquire then into,

1. The truth of the fact—

[There is something so marvellous, and almost incredible, in the idea of God becoming man, in order to save a ruined world, that it should not be hastily embraced, no, not even though it were declared by an angel from heaven. It becomes us to examine what can be adduced in confirmation of it. We should, with the Bereans, "search the Scriptures daily, to see if these things be so^b." We should inquire whether the Prophets spake any thing respecting this great event^c; whether they gave any reason to believe, that God would ever take upon him our nature, and accomplish our salvation in so strange a way^d. We should inquire what proof the Apostles had that they were rightly informed; and what evidence there is, that, in relating these things to us, they were divinely inspired^e. In short, we should, if I may so speak, "go to Bethlehem," and see for ourselves; yea, we should "make haste" to do so, lest we lose the opportunity afforded us, or become indifferent to the report itself.]

2. The grounds and reasons of it—

[It cannot be that such an event should ever have taken place without some urgent necessity. We should therefore inquire what occasion there was for it. If we do this, we shall find that among the various reasons that will occur to the mind, there are two peculiarly prominent, two that will sufficiently account for the whole mystery; and these are, *Man's happiness*, and *God's honour*. Without the incarnation and death of the Son of God, man could never have attained to happiness. He was reduced to the state of the fallen angels in respect of guilt; and he must have resembled them in respect of misery, if such a way had not been devised and executed for his recovery. Moreover, it was in this way only that God could save man, and at the same time maintain the honour of his own perfections.

^a Acts iv. 12.

^b Acts xvii. 11.

^c 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

^d See Notes ^a ^b ^c.

^e 2 Tim. iii. 16. 2 Pet. i. 21.

fections. Without an atonement, his justice could not be satisfied: nor could his mercy be exercised in consistency with his truth and holiness. It was, that "mercy and truth might meet together, and that righteousness and peace might kiss each other"; it was for this end, I say, that our God became incarnate: and the more we examine into the reasons of this mysterious dispensation, the more we shall be satisfied, that it is in every respect worthy of its Divine Author.]

3. Its use and importance—

[We are not to amuse ourselves with empty speculations upon such momentous points as this; but to inquire into their practical use and importance. Now these tidings will upon examination be found as important to us as to any people at any period of the world. Our first and great concern is, How may we be reconciled to our offended God? To this we find a complete and satisfactory answer in the event referred to: The Lord Jesus Christ has become a Mediator between God and man; he has taken our nature, in order that he might "bear our sins in his own sacred body," and work out a righteousness whereby we might be justified; so that "God may now be just, and yet the justifier of all that believe". In this mystery the burthened conscience finds rest and peace. From this, the vilest of the human race may take encouragement to return to God; and be fully assured that, for Christ's sake, all his iniquities shall be pardoned, and not one of them be remembered against him any more for ever°. Surely then we should spare no pains in investigating these things, that so we may derive from them the consolation and happiness they are intended to convey.]

To recommend yet further this spirit of inquiry, we shall CONCLUDE, with shewing you the benefits that will result from it:

1. You will receive conviction in your own minds—

[The shepherds did not doubt the veracity of the angels; but their faith was certainly confirmed, when they had ocular demonstration of the fact that had been related to them. Thus, though we may not really disbelieve the incarnation of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, or doubt whether he be the only, and all-sufficient Saviour of the world, yet the more we examine the Scriptures with humility and prayer, the more deep will be our insight into this "great mystery of godliness," and the more shall we attain "a full assurance of understanding" with respect to it.

° Ps. lxxv. 10.

° Rom. iii. 25, 26.

° Heb. viii. 12.

Let this then incline us to go with one accord to Bethlehem, and to commence the pious search: yea, let the hope and prospect of so rich a benefit stimulate us to united and instantaneous exertions.]

2. You will be disposed to communicate the joyful tidings to others—

[This was the first-fruit of the conviction which the shepherds had received: "When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child^p." And will you be contented to "put your light under a bushel?" Will you not rather imitate the famished lepers, who, when they had found the Syrian camp deserted, and a vast plenty of provisions and booty of every kind lying unprotected, "said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings; and we hold our peace: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household^q?" You find in general, that persons are averse to speak of the great mysteries of redemption, because they have so little considered them: on the contrary, they who feel the importance of them, cannot be restrained from speaking of them: and if they be derided or menaced for their zeal, they will give the same answer as the Apostles did, "We cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard^r."]]

3. You will abound in praises and thanksgiving to God for them—

[In this respect also the shepherds manifested the fruits of diligent and humble inquiry: "They returned, glorying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them^s." And shall not we feel a similar disposition, if once our hearts be duly impressed with these things? Yes; if we "muse as we ought, the fire will kindle, and at last we shall speak with our tongues^t." We shall vie even with the angelic hosts in singing, "Glory to God in the highest for the peace which is brought down on earth, and the good-will that is thereby expressed towards man."

If then our fellow-creatures have any claim upon us for the benefit of our instructions, or God has any demands upon our gratitude for the stupendous mercies he has vouchsafed unto us, then should we search with diligence into the truths that are revealed, in order that we may be quickened to the performance of our duty, and be stimulated to pay our tribute of love to man, and of praise to God.]

^p ver. 17.

^s ver. 20.

^q 2 Kin. vii. 8, 9.

^t Ps. xxxix. 3.

^r Acts iv. 19, 20.

DCCLIV.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.

Luke ii. 21. *And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

THE naming of children has often been used, not merely for distinction sake, but also to express some expectation or wish which the parent entertained respecting his child. Of course, the name must frequently have ill-suited the character of the person that bore it. This was remarkably the case with the two first children that were born into the world. Adam named the first, Cain, (which signifies *getting*,) supposing that he had *gotten* that Promised Seed who was to repair the ruins of the Fall: and his second son he named Abel (*vanity*), having already had abundant evidence of the sinful dispositions of Cain. But in both he was mistaken; for the former proved a murderer; and the latter, a distinguished saint.

But God has on several occasions condescended to give names to children previous to their conception in the womb: and the names so given have always designated the real character of the persons themselves. We are particularly informed, that God required the child which he gave to Zacharias and Elizabeth to be called John, which means *race* or *favour*; because, whilst he was a *favour* bestowed on them, he was to be an object of God's peculiar favour, and an occasion of much good to others^a.

The name of Jesus also was given by the angel to the Virgin's Child, "before he was conceived in her womb." And how significant this was, it is scarcely needful to mention. It was the same name with Joshua, and meant *Divine Saviour*: and was therefore most fitly given to Him, who was "Emmanuel, God with us," and who was destined "to save his people from their sins^b." The time of imposing the
name

^a Luke i. 13, 14.

^b Matt. i. 21—23. For a fuller explanation of this, see Skelton 158 in the Helps to Composition.

name on a child was generally that of his circumcision. It was thus in the case of John^c, as also in that of Jesus: the solemnity of that rite giving an additional weight to the name imposed.

But it is to the rite itself, that is, to circumcision, that we shall confine our attention at this time: for, in point of importance, it seems to have been the first and greatest of all the ordinances among the Jews. We propose to shew,

I. The nature and intent of circumcision—

It was originally given to Abraham as a seal of the covenant of *grace*—

[God made a covenant with Abraham, to give him a numerous posterity, with the land of Canaan for their inheritance; and at last one particular Seed, “in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” This promise Abraham believed; and he looked forward to that peculiar Seed as the true and only source of blessings to himself. In consequence of this faith, he was accepted of God; who engaged to treat him as a righteous person, through the righteousness of the Saviour imputed to him^d. And in token that he would execute every part of this gracious covenant, he appointed him and all his posterity to be circumcised. This is the account which St. Paul himself gives of this ordinance: he calls it a “*sign*,” and a “*seal*:”. a “*sign*” to Abraham and his Seed, that they were the Lord’s peculiar people; and a “*seal*” to them, that God would be his and their God, provided they walked in the faith, and in the steps of their father Abraham^e. As a *sign*, it shewed them their engagements to God; and as a *seal*, God’s engagements to them.]

But, as continued to the Jews, in and after the days of Moses, it was a seal of the covenant of works—

[The Mosaic covenant differed materially from that of Abraham, and yet the same ordinance was a seal to both. The rite of circumcision was absolutely indispensable to all: it was invariably the rite, by which, and by which alone, any persons, whether infants or adults, were initiated into that covenant. And in what light were they taught to view it? We answer, as binding them to an observance of the whole law of Moses, and as suspending their salvation on their performance of this condition. In this light St. Peter viewed it, when

^c Luke i. 59—63. ^d Rom. iv. 3, 18—25. ^e ib. ver. 11, 12.

^f Gen. xvii. 14. It was equally enjoined by the Law. Compare Exod. xii. 48. with John vii. 22.

when that famous controversy respecting circumcision was brought before the whole College of Apostles at Jerusalem: he reproved those who insisted on the observance of that rite, for "putting a yoke upon the Christians, which not even the most eminent among the Jews had been able to bear^a." Of course, if circumcision had not bound them to the observance of the whole law of Moses, there could have been no foundation for this objection. St. Paul yet more strongly confirms this statement: for he says to those who were in danger of being misled by the Judaism Christians, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing: for I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that *he is a debtor to do the whole law*^b." Here then the point is clear; that though circumcision was given *primarily* as a seal of the covenant of Grace, it was *eventually* (though not expressly called so) a seal of the covenant of Works also. From the time that it was first instituted, it continued to be a *sign* and a *seal*; but the privileges of which they were a seal, and the obligations of which they were a sign, varied according to the nature of the covenant to which the rite itself was annexed: to Abraham, it sealed the covenant of *Grace*; to Moses and the Jews, the covenant of *Works*.]

This view of the rite will throw light upon,

II. The reasons of our Lord's submitting to it—

These were chiefly two;

1. That he might appear to be the Promised Seed—

[The person in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, was marked out by God as one particular individual, who should in due time arise, and in whom "the covenant made with Abraham should be confirmed." St. Paul infers this from the very term used on that occasion being in the singular number: and though we should not have conceded to him that inference, *as a Critic*, we doubt not but that the truths he affirms, was intended, by the Holy Ghost, to be marked in that very expression on which he founds his remark^c. At all events, the Messiah was to be of the posterity of Abraham; all of whom were circumcised: therefore, if Jesus were not circumcised, he could have no claim, no allowable claim, to this distinction: whatever he might be, he could not be acknowledged to be a child of Abraham. It is true, this mark could not distinguish him as the Messiah, because

^a Acts xv. 1, 10.

^b Gal. v. 2, 3.

^c Gal. iii. 16.

because it was common to all the Jews: but the want of it would have been an infallible proof that he was not the Messiah; and therefore he submitted to receive it.]

2. That he might be fully under the obligations of the Mosaic law—

[Mankind at large were subject only to the moral law; and therefore for *their* redemption it would have been sufficient for the Son of God to assume our nature: but the House of Israel, for whose salvation he was sent in the first instance, were under the ceremonial law; and therefore for *their* redemption he must be made under that also. This is particularly noticed by St. Paul, who says, that “in the fulness of time God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, *made under the law*, that he might redeem *them that were under the law*.” Now it was by circumcision that the children of the Jews were initiated into the Mosaic covenant, and brought fully into subjection to the law. Hence therefore Christ submitted to circumcision, and acknowledged at all times his obligation to obey that law in every thing. He says himself, “I am not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them.” There is one very remarkable instance of his obedience to the law, which reflects considerable light on the subject before us. Baptism was not any part of the original law: but it had been introduced as an additional rite for the admission of proselytes into the Jewish religion: and the introduction of it had been so far sanctioned by God himself, that John, the forerunner of our Lord, was expressly commissioned to baptize all who desired an admission into the kingdom of the Messiah. Hence Jesus Christ himself went to be baptized of him: and upon John’s declining it as unsuitable to the dignity of our Lord, Jesus said to him, “Suffer it to be so now; for thus *it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*.” The same strict adherence to the law was observable in him at all times, except when the execution of his high office, and the establishment of his Divine authority, required a temporary deviation from it. Indeed, he not only fulfilled the law, but was himself the completion of it; every part of it being accomplished in him as its great prototype. In a word, if he would redeem mankind, he must do it by obeying that law which we had broken, and enduring those penalties which we had incurred. This therefore he undertook to do, that, by his atoning sufferings and perfect obedience, he might restore us to our forfeited inheritance. Of this work his circumcision was the commencement: it was the commencement of those sufferings which constitute his atoning sacrifice, and of that obedience which constitutes our justifying righteousness.

It

* Gal. iv. 4, 5.

¹ Matt. iii. 15.

It was the commencement of that "work which God had given him to do," and which terminated at last in what the Apostle fitly calls, "his obedience unto death."]

Let us now turn our attention to,

III. The lessons, which his submission to it may teach us—

It may well teach us,

1. To observe the instituted ordinances of our religion—

[Circumcision, with respect to us, is done away, and is superseded by the milder rite of baptism. But baptism is as necessary for us, as circumcision was to the Jews; and it is to be administered to the very same persons.]

We know that this is a point disputed by many; who are fond of bringing forward the controversy on all occasions. Far be it from us to encourage a controversial spirit: we would avoid it, and discourage it, to the utmost of our power. Yet it is necessary that we should instruct those who are under our charge in all things relating to their duty; and therefore, without offence to others, we may be allowed to state with plainness our views and sentiments.

Two reasons in particular are urged for not administering baptism to infants; the one is, that we are not any where commanded to do so; the other is, that children are not capable of all the ends of baptism; since baptism presupposes a knowledge and approbation of those principles, into which we are baptized.

But to this we answer, What occasion was there for renewed orders concerning a thing that had already existed two thousand years? A rite more suited to our dispensation was introduced; but the persons interested in it *were* not therefore deprived of their birthright. If it was intended to abridge the privileges of children, we might well expect that such an intention should have been expressed: but where has God expressed it? and who but God can take away the privileges which God has given?

Again: If it be any argument against the baptism of children, that they cannot understand the principles which they become pledged to maintain, it is equally so against the circumcision of infants: and whosoever will condemn *that*, let him answer it to God.

Be it so; children are not capable of all the ends of baptism. But was Christ capable of all the ends of circumcision? was not one end of it to put away (emblematically then, and really afterwards) the lusts of the flesh? But had *he* any lusts to put away? Yet he was circumcised: and consequently,

sequently, children may now be baptized, though they be not capable of all the ends of baptism.

Once more: Are not children capable of receiving the blessings of the covenant? for our Lord says, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." And if they are capable of the *blessings* of the covenant, are they not also of the *seals*; when those seals are nothing more than a token from God that the blessings shall be theirs?

We have said thus much, not for the sake of stirring up controversy, but of confirming you in the principles, which, as Members of the Church of England, you profess.

This only we add, that if Jesus Christ submitted to circumcision for the good of his enemies, much more should you consult the benefit of your children by dedicating them to God in baptism.]

2. To seek² that purity of which circumcision was an emblem—

[What the true circumcision was, we are abundantly informed both by Moses and the prophets^m. Even at that time circumcision, if not accompanied with a suitable course of life, was accounted for uncircumcision: and much more, under our dispensation, must those only be accounted Christians, who are such in deed and in truthⁿ. We will call upon you all then, not to rest in your baptism, as though that made you Christians, but to seek the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and "the answer of a good conscience towards God^o." It is remarkable that St. Paul represents this very purification as the thing intended to be produced by the circumcision of Christ. We are (federally) "circumcised in him:" but (personally) we are to "put away the body of the sins of the flesh^p." And the very promise which God has given us, is, that "he will circumcise our hearts, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul^q." Look ye to it then, my Brethren, that this seal of our Covenant be found in you. "Put off the Old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the New man, which after God is renewed in righteousness and true holiness." It may be painful thus to mortify the flesh; but it must be done, if you would have any well-founded hope towards God: for, notwithstanding "salvation is bestowed by grace through faith," yet it is an unalterable truth, that "they who are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

^a Deut. x. 16. Jer. iv. 4.

ⁿ Rom. ii. 25, 28, 29.

^o 1 Pet. iii. 21.

^p Col. ii. 10, 11.

^q Deut. xxx. 6.

DCCLV.

PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE.

Luke ii. 22—24. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, (as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord,) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

IT is a comfortable consideration to the poor and ignorant, that they may possess the knowledge of salvation, though they have never been instructed in the nature of the Mosaic law, or seen its full connexion with Christianity. But it is certain that a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures tends exceedingly to establish us in the faith, and to quicken us to a holy obedience. The importance of being acquainted with the Old Testament, appears from the frequent reference which there is to it in the New Testament. Sometimes we meet with references put interrogatively, "What is written in the Law?" What saith the Law? and sometimes positively, "It is written in the Law." Hence it is obvious that, without an acquaintance with the Law, much of the force and evidence of the Christian Scriptures must be lost: and therefore we cannot but earnestly recommend an attention to the Old Testament, as the means of more fully comprehending the New. In the short passage before us, we are directed no less than three times to compare the history with the ordinances which had before been given to Moses: the time of the Virgin's purification, the offering she offered, and the presentation of her infant Son in the Temple, are all said to be "according to the law of the Lord." To that then we shall refer you, while we consider,

I. The purification of the mother—

For the elucidation of this subject, there are several distinct inquiries to be made—

What

What did the Law enjoin in relation to purification after child-birth?

[A woman was deemed unclean for seven days after her deliverance from child-birth, so that she rendered every one unclean who even came in contact with her: and for thirty-three days afterwards she was not permitted to touch any holy thing, or to enter into the Temple. The time was doubled for a female child: the mother was then more or less unclean for eighty days. She was then to come to the door of the Tabernacle, and to present there a lamb and a pigeon; the pigeon for a sin-offering, and the lamb for a burnt-offering: by the sin-offering acknowledging her sinfulness, and by the burnt-offering testifying her gratitude for the mercies vouchsafed unto her. If the mother were poor, she might offer a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons; the burnt-offering might be suited to her means; but, whatever were her circumstances, her sin-offering must be the same: because the same atonement is necessary for all; but the modes of testifying our gratitude must vary according to our various situations in life^a.

Such was the ordinance itself. We proceed to ask,]

What sentiments was this law intended to convey?

[The very offerings which were presented on the occasion, intimated, that they who had experienced deliverance from child-birth had just occasion for renewed expressions of humiliation and gratitude. Such is the state of human nature since the Fall; that a taint is contracted, and communicated also, by that law which was given to man in innocence, "Increase and multiply." David says, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Indeed the very pangs of child-birth remind all who are called to endure them, of the first transgression; and, as being inflicted on account of sin, they call for acknowledgments of our sinful state. This, I say, was intimated by the sin-offering, whereby "an atonement was made for her who offered it." The burnt-offering, as a token of gratitude, needs no comment; every one must see that it was proper for the occasion, and justly expressed, what might be supposed to be, the state of her mind.

Yet there is good reason to inquire,]

What necessity was there for the mother of our Lord to obey this law?

[Certainly, whatever taint may be contracted by others, none could have been by her on this occasion. Yet, as the manner of her conception was not generally known, and

Joseph

^a See Lev. xii. 1—8.

Joseph was her reputed husband, it was proper to comply with the requisitions of the law, as much as if she had borne a child in the common way. It would have ill become her to cast a stumbling-block before others on this occasion: and her own heart was so full of love to God, that she counted nothing a burthen that she could do for him. She determined therefore, as Jesus himself did in the instance of his baptism, to fulfil all righteousness to the utmost of her power.

It may be asked however,]

What is this law to us?

* [Doubtless, as to the ceremonial part of it, it is abrogated altogether: but, as to its spiritual import, it speaks as loudly to us as ever it did to the Jews. *Humiliation and gratitude* are the proper fruits of mercies received: I say, *humiliation, first, and then gratitude*. This is not the order in which these feelings arise in the *mind* of a philosopher; but it is the order in which they rise in the heart of a Christian: a sense of unworthiness abases his soul in the dust, and enhances, beyond all expression, the favours conferred upon him. We appeal to every spiritual person for the truth of this: and we call on every one, whatever be the mercies he has received, to express his sense of them in this way. Certainly they who have been delivered from the pains of child-birth, have abundant reason to present such offerings to God: and we do not hesitate to say, that their expressions of gratitude should be diversified and enlarged according to the opportunities and abilities that God has given them. We must not however limit the subject to this particular deliverance: for, whatever mercy God has vouchsafed unto us, we should endeavour to requite him according to the loving-kindness he has shewn us.]

Having thus considered the purification of the mother, let us direct our attention to,

II. The presentation of her Son—

Here is the same reference to the Law as before. We will state to you,

1. What connexion it had with Christ's Presentation in the Temple—

[Upon the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, whilst not one of the first-born, either of men or cattle, that belonged to Israel, died; God claimed the first-born of Israel, both of men and beasts, as his peculiar property^b; and required

^b Exod. xiii. 2.

required that the reason of his so doing should be transmitted carefully to the latest posterity^c. Afterwards he accepted the tribe of Levi and their cattle in the place of the first-born and their cattle^d; and appointed *them*, with very peculiar and impressive solemnities^e, to be consecrated to his service in their stead. He appointed also that the precise number of the persons belonging to each should be ascertained; and it being found that the first-born were 273 more in number than the Levites, he ordered that they should be redeemed at the price of five shekels a piece, (about 12s. 6d. each,) and that the money should be paid to Aaron and his sons for the service of the tabernacle^f, and from that time it was an established law, that every male which opened the womb should be holy to the Lord^g; the clean *beasts* were to be sacrificed to him; and the unclean to be redeemed with a lamb: but the first-born of *men*, were universally to be redeemed; his mercy to them, and his consequent propriety in them, being thus kept is everlasting remembrance^h.

Now Christ, as Mary's first-born, came under this law; and though his life had never been forfeited, yet, to fulfil the law, and cut off all occasion of offence, he must be redeemed in the same manner as others. For this purpose his parents carried him to the Temple, and presented him before the Lord in the way that God had appointed.

But it may be asked, Did the blessed Virgin wish to exempt him from the peculiar service of her God? No: she knew that he was sent into the world to be his servant, and that his ear was bored to the door-post as soon as he assumed our natureⁱ: but she would omit nothing which the Law required; either at *her* hands or *his*: teaching us thereby to sink all personal concerns in a regard for the honour of our God, and the good of our fellow-creatures.]

2. What their compliance with the Law in this instance may teach us—

[Loudly indeed does it speak to *mothers*. Behold the blessed Virgin taking her infant child “to present him to the Lord:” is not this the thing which you should do the very moment you embrace your new-born babe? Should you not do it every time that you administer to its necessities, or supply its wants? Methinks you should never draw out the breast to it, without lifting up your heart in prayer for it, and intreating God

^c Exod. xiii. 11—14. ^d Num. iii. 11—13.

^e Num. viii. 5—23. ^f Num. iii. 39—51. ^g Num. xviii. 15, 16.

^h If the *whole* of the various passages cited upon this subject be not read, very large and copious extracts at least should be made, in order to lay the subject fully before the audience.

ⁱ Comp. Ps. xl. 6. with Heb. x. 5,

God to accept and own it, as a child of his. How can any of you endure the thought of bringing forth for Satan, and nourishing, a child for him? Surely your prayer should often be, 'Lord, I ask not for my child the things of this world; (give him food and raiment, and I am content;) but I ask for grace; I ask for mercy; I ask for peace; I ask for all the blessings of salvation for him. I ask that thou thyself mayest be his portion, and that he may be the lot of thine inheritance. Yes, ye who have travailed in birth with your dear children, let your anxieties for them be summed up in this, that they may be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." If you "travail in birth with them again and again till Christ be formed in them," so far from pitying your anguish, I will rejoice over you, and say, that "your labour shall not be in vain." Little do mothers consider how much, under God, the salvation of their children depends on them. Little do they think how the prayers they have offered *for*, and *with*, their children, and the tears they have shed over them, would impress their tender minds, long after *their* tongues have been silent in the grave; and probably induce a penitential sorrow, when some concurring providence shall have softened and prepared their minds. Were parents more anxious about the spiritual welfare of their children, we should not so often find them in their declining years bowed down with trouble, and "their grey hairs brought with sorrow to the grave."

And does not the Presentation of the infant Jesus, in the Temple speak to *young people* also? Yes surely; and that too in most instructive terms. You are ready to think it too early yet awhile to give yourselves to the Lord: but can that ever be too early, which is your most indispensable duty, your highest privilege, you surest felicity? Did Samuel ever regret that he was given to the Lord even from his mother's womb? Did Timothy spend a less happy life, because he followed the faith and piety of Lois and Eunice? If you could but once taste the blessedness of true religion, you would never think of it as a toil, or dread it as a bondage: having "drunk water out of the wells of salvation," you would most contentedly leave to others the muddy draughts which they with difficulty collect from their own "broken cisterns." Be prevailed upon then to make the attempt; to give yourselves to the Lord; to commence that blessed course which Jesus trod before you. You have a special promise given you by God himself; "They that seek me early, shall find me." The Lord impress it on your minds, and lead you to a sweet experience of its truth and blessedness!

But the subject speaks to *all* of us; yes, I say, to *all*. Do we not all profess to be "the Church of the *first-born*?" and
is

is it not on that ground that we hope to be numbered with "the general assembly, who are written in heaven?" Behold then, we all belong to God: he lays claim to every one of us, and says, "They are mine." True, "we have been redeemed, yea redeemed, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." But wherefore have we been redeemed? That we might *not* serve the Lord? Nay; but that we *might* serve him: "Christ has redeemed us, that he might purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." In the name of God then I say, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore ye should glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his." And here let me observe to you, that there is no commutation of service admitted or allowed. If all the tribes of the earth should offer to stand in your place, and to serve God in your stead, he would not regard their offer, nor dispense with your service. All of you must surrender up yourselves to him. You have already been devoted to him in baptism: remember then the vows that are upon you: Remember "whose you are, and whom you are bound to serve:" and know assuredly, that those words which are so often, but so ignorantly, uttered by us in our prayers, contain the very truth of God; "his service is perfect freedom."]

DCCLVI.

CHRIST THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL.

Luke ii. 25. *The same man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel.*

IN every age of the Church, there have been some distinguished from the common herd of professors, by their unfeigned zeal and piety. At the time when our blessed Lord came into the world, the Jewish nation were in a most degenerate state: yet were there some, who, with humble and assured expectation, "looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Amongst those was that aged Saint, "to whom it was revealed, that he should not see death, till he should have seen the Lord's Christ:" "the same man was just and devout," waiting for the sight of him whom he regarded as "the Consolation of Israel," and expecting it as the consummation of all his wishes.

The

The description here given of our Lord is worthy of peculiar attention; while the conduct of the holy Patriarch is also replete with useful instruction. We propose therefore to consider,

I. In what respects Christ is "the Consolation of Israel"—

The Scriptures inform us, that there is consolation in Christ^a, even abundant^b and everlasting consolation^c. Our Lord himself, speaking of the Spirit, calls him "*another Comforter*^d," intimating thereby that he himself had sustained and executed this office. But as the Israel of God in that age were in some respects different from the Israel that now is, it will be proper to distinguish between them, and to shew in what respects this glorious title is applicable to Christ;

1. In reference to the Jewish Church—

[He came to give them clearer light. Moses had revealed to them the will of God: but he had put a veil upon his face to intimate the darkness of that dispensation^e; and had expressly referred them to a Prophet who should arise after him, to whom they must look for fuller instructions^f. The prophets of later ages taught the people to look forward to the times of the Messiah, when the glorious light should arise upon the Church, to chase away all the clouds of darkness in which it was then involved^g; insomuch that at the time of Christ's advent there was a general and assured expectation, that a fuller revelation was about to be given them by him: "We know that Messias cometh, who is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things"^h.

He came also to deliver them from the yoke of the ceremonial law. This was a heavy burthen, which not even the most spiritual among them was able to support. This was never intended to continue any longer than the period fixed for the Messiah's advent. It was foretold by David, that a Priest should arise after the order of Melchizedec; and consequently, with the change of priesthood, there must be a change of the whole law that related to itⁱ. Other prophets spake of "a new covenant"^k, and of "a shaking again, not of the earth only,

^a Phil. ii. 1

^c 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.

^e 2 Cor. iii. 13.

^g Isai. lx. 1—3. Mal. iv. 2.

ⁱ Heb. vii. 11, 12.

^b 2 Cor. i. 5.

^d John xiv. 16.

^f Deut. xviii. 15.

^h John iv. 25.

^k Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

only, but also of the heavens¹:" by which they intimated that the old covenant should vanish away^m, and that the new order of things, which could not be shaken, should remain, after that the former was abrogated and dissolvedⁿ.

He came moreover *to establish an universal empire*. The Jews in general misunderstood the prophecies relating to this event, and supposed that their Messiah would erect a temporal monarchy: but those who had a clearer insight into the meaning of the prophets, expected the establishment of a spiritual kingdom, wherein they should not merely be "delivered from all their enemies, but should serve God without fear in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of their life^o."

To those who viewed him as the appointed Source of these benefits, his advent must be an occasion of most exalted joy: and accordingly it was announced as such by the angelic hosts, who said, "Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord^p."

2. In reference to the Christian Church—

[Having partaken of all the preceding benefits, we are led to contemplate the Saviour more immediately in reference to our own necessities: And O, what a consolation is he to us; while we view him as a *Propitiation for our sins*! What tongue can utter the feelings of a contrite soul, when, after many fears of God's wrath, it is enabled to see the efficacy of Christ's atonement? Oh! the peace, the joy, the exultation that arise from every fresh application of his blood to the conscience! Well is "the peace said to pass understanding," and "the joy of believing to be unspeakable and glorified!"

But we are enabled to view him further as our "*Advocate with the Father*." In this light, he is, if possible; more precious than in the former. The comfort springing from his sacrifice would be greatly diminished, if we did not know that he is entered into heaven with his own blood, to plead the merit of it on our behalf. What should we do under any fresh contracted guilt, if we had not an Intercessor, through whom we might return to God, and offer our petitions with confidence of acceptance? Weak and frail as we are, we should sit down in despair: but having such an High Priest that is passed into the heavens for us, we may come boldly to the throne of grace, assured of obtaining mercy, and of finding grace to help us in the time of need^q.

Further, we behold him also as a *fountain of all spiritual blessings*.

¹ Hag. ii. 6.

^m Heb. viii. 8.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 25, 27.

^o Luke i. 72—75.

^p Luke ii. 10, 11.

^q Heb. iv. 14, 16.

blessings. "It hath pleased the Father that in Christ should 'all fulness dwell'. Whatever we want, whether wisdom, or righteousness, or strength, there is a fulness of it all in him; and we may say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength". What an unspeakable consolation must this be to those who feel their emptiness and poverty? What blessed confidence does it bring into the soul, when, under a full conviction that we have not in ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought, we are enabled to say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me!"

In these views "Christ is so precious to those who believe in him," that they "account all things but loss and dung in comparison of the knowledge of him*."] "

It will not be unprofitable to consider,

II. In what manner we are to "wait for" him—

In the precise sense in which this expression is used in the text, we can now only wait for his coming to judge the world. But there is a spiritual advent to the soul, which every Believer is entitled to expect: for, as Christ said to his Disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless; *I will come unto you*"; so he says to every obedient follower, "I will come unto you, and make my abode with you". This advent therefore we are entitled to expect: and we should wait for it,

1. In a renunciation of all other comforters—

[The ungodly; in their troubles, go, like the Jews of old, to the creature for help and comfort^a: the worldling, to his business; the voluptuary, to his indulgences; the man of gaiety, to his sports; and the formalist, to his duties. They all "forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water^b." But we must go to Him, who invites the weary and heavy-laden, and gives them assurances of rest^c. The language of our hearts must be, "Lord, to whom shall we go^d? Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that we desire besides thee^e." "None else shall save us; for in thee, even in thee alone, the fatherless findeth mercy^f."] "

2. In a firm persuasion of his all-sufficiency—

[We

^a Col. i. 19. ^b Isai. xlv. 24. ^c 2 Cor. iii. 5. ^d Phil iv. 13.
^e Phil. iii. 8. ^f John xiv. 18. ^g John xiv. 21—23.
^h Hos. v. 13. ⁱ Jer. ii. 13. ^j Matt. xi. 28.
^k John vi. 68. ^l Ps. lxxiii. 25. ^m Hos. xiv. 3.

[We shall in vain hope for comfort in Christ, if we doubt either his power or his willingness to save us. "If our faith be wavering, we shall receive nothing of the Lord^s." We should not therefore come to Christ, saying, "Lord, if thou canst do any thing for us, interpose and help us^b;" but, "Lord, I know that with thee all things are possibleⁱ:" thy blood can cleanse from the deepest guilt^k; thy grace can vanquish the most deep-rooted lusts^l; and one glimpse of thy countenance can turn all my sorrows into joy^m. "Having thee, though possessed of nothing else, I possess all thingsⁿ." What a holy glorying would such views of Christ introduce into the soul, even if its distresses were ever so accumulated^o! Surely, our consolations should abound not only above, but also in proportion to, our heaviest afflictions^p.]

3. In an assured expectation of his promised advent—

[That he has promised to come to the souls of his afflicted people has been before shewn. Indeed a very principal end of his heavenly Mission was, "to comfort them that mourn in Zion, and to appoint unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^q." Will he then relinquish the work he has undertaken? Will he violate his own engagements? "Is he a man, that he should lie, or the Son of Man, that he should repent?" Let us not then listen to the suggestions of unbelief and impatience^r; but rather obey the voice of the Prophet, who says, "Though the vision tarry, wait for it; for in due time it shall come and shall not tarry^s."]

Our IMPROVEMENT of this subject shall be,

1. In a way of inquiry—

[What do we make the ground of *our* consolation? We see what is supremely and exclusively the consolation of *Israel*. O that our regard to Christ may testify for us, that we belong to the true Israel!]

2. In a way of encouragement—

[Consolation implies some previous trouble. Now, trouble, if not of a temporal, yet certainly of a spiritual kind, we must all feel. Let us acquaint ourselves with Christ, and we shall never be at a loss for comfort. Let us live nigh to him, and we may defy all the powers of earth and hell^t.]

^s Jam. i. 6, 7.

^b Mark ix. 22.

ⁱ Job xlii. 2.

^k 1 John i. 7. Isai. i. 18.

^l 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^m Ps. iv. 6. & xlii. 11.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^o 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^p See Note ^b.

^q Isai. lxi. 1—3.

^r Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^s Hab. ii. 3.

^t See Isai. xxv. 9.

DCCLVII.

TESTIMONY BORNE TO JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

Luke ii. 28—32. *Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy Salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

WHILST we are noticing, as they arise, the various steps of our Saviour's humiliation, we shall have repeated occasions to observe, how carefully God has guarded us against the unfavourable impressions which we might otherwise have received from them. At no season was the Divine interposition more remarkable than at our Saviour's birth. The circumstances that attended it were as humiliating as could well be conceived; for he was born in a stable, and laid in a manger. But the descent of angels from heaven to announce and celebrate his advent, was more than sufficient to counterbalance the effect, which the meanness of his appearance might produce. Thus it was also when he was presented to the Lord by his parents, at the time of his mother's purification in the Temple. He was presented in order to be redeemed, as all other first-born children were; as though his life had been forfeited, as well as theirs. But, as a counterpoise to this, an aged Saint, to whom it had been promised that he should not die till he had seen the Messiah, was warned by an express revelation from above to go into the Temple for that purpose. Whilst he was there, the Child was brought thither by his parents; and this holy man was inspired to distinguish his person, and to proclaim his character. His language on this occasion is very instructive: it shews us,

I. What views we should have of Christ—

We have no reason to think that in his outward appearance the infant Jesus was at all different from others. But this aged Saint, on taking him up in his arms, announced him,

1. As

1. As the Divinely-appointed Saviour—

[It was to God the Father that this holy man addressed his devout acknowledgments, and said, “Mine eyes have *seen* thy Salvation.” We must never forget, that the Father is the fountain, from whence the streams of salvation flow. He is “the giver of every good and perfect gift;” and the gift of his dear Son to a ruined world was altogether the fruit of his love. “He prepared for him a body:” He qualified him for his office by an immeasurable communication of the Holy Spirit. He upheld him in the execution of his work, protected and preserved him till his hour was come, and enabled him to persevere till he could say, “It is finished.”

Moreover the Father himself bore testimony to him under that character. Thrice, by an audible voice from heaven, did he point him out to the world in that view; “This is that my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear him.” He constrained angels (both good and bad), and men (enemies as well as friends), to unite their testimony with his. In raising up Jesus from the dead, he declared also with irresistible evidence, that Jesus was his Son; and that what he had done for the salvation of the world, was accepted in our behalf. The Apostles, whom he sent forth to instruct the world, were everywhere to bear this testimony, that the “Father had sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world:” and the Holy Ghost was poured out upon thousands, both in his gracious influences and miraculous powers, in order to confirm their word.

In a word, our blessed Lord himself always spake of himself as *sent* by the Father to perform *His* will; and therefore, whilst we thankfully acknowledge the readiness with which Jesus undertook our cause, we must always regard him as *God’s* salvation, *commissioned by him for that purpose, accepted by him in that capacity, and proclaimed by him for that end.*]

2. As the universal Saviour—

[The immediate and primary objects of the Messiah’s attention were, (as our Lord himself informs us,) “the lost sheep of the House of Israel.” And, after his resurrection, he gave especial commandment, that his Apostles, who were commissioned to preach the Gospel to all nations, should make the first offers of salvation to the Jews, even in that very city where he had so recently been condemned to death, and to that very people who had imbrued their hands in his blood^b. Accordingly we find that the Apostles forbore to preach unto the Gentiles, till the Jews had obstinately rejected their testimony, and poured contempt upon the proffered salvation^c.

But

^a Matt. xv. 24.

^b Luke xxiv. 47.

^c Acts xiii. 46.

But the ultimate design of God was to give salvation to the world at large. If the Jews were to have the peculiar glory of giving birth to the Saviour, and of having the Gospel first ministered to them, they were not to engross all the benefits of his Mission. The Gentiles, who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, were to behold his light, and to be guided by him into the paths of peace. Wherever there is a fallen Child of Adam, there is a person for whom Christ came into the world, and to whom the Gospel, if thankfully accepted, shall become the power of God unto salvation. *We* are of Gentile extraction, and to us are the blessings of salvation offered: nor should we ever name the name of Christ, without feeling our obligations to him, and glorying in him as "all our salvation and all our desire."

These two points which we have noticed in the text, as distinguishing the character of the Saviour, are united by the Prophet; who represents the Father as, addressing his Son in these memorable terms: "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be MY salvation unto the ends of the earth^d."

That these views are not merely of a speculative nature, will be evident, whilst we notice,

II. The blessed effects of them upon a dying hour—

That the aged Saint was *in a measure* affected, as Jacob was 'at the sight of his beloved Joseph', we may very well concede: but still there was a difference between the two cases, corresponding with the difference between the objects seen: the one was affected *as a parent*, at the sight of a long-lamented son; the other, *as a Believer*, at the sight of him on whom all his hopes, and the hopes of a ruined world, were built. The fact is, that a sight of Christ *in his true character* has now, and at all times, the very same effect. The mere circumstance of beholding his bodily presence, or of taking him up into one's arms, would never reconcile one to the thoughts of death: but the beholding of him as the Author and Procurer of salvation, (as we may do by faith,) will universally,

1. Divest

^d Isai. xlix. 6.

* Gen. xlii. 90.

1. Divest death of its terrors—

[That which makes death terrible, is sin. We know in our minds that sin is hateful unto God, and that he has denounced his heavy judgments against it: and consequently whilst that continues unrepented of, we cannot but feel a secret dread of God's tribunal, and of the sentence that shall be passed upon us. But, if we have "by faith seen him who is invisible," if we have embraced in our hearts the Lord Jesus, and relied upon him as the appointed Saviour of the world, what have we to fear? "Our iniquity is forgiven, and our sin is covered:" by "believing in Jesus, we are justified from all things:" even "sins of a crimson dye are made white as snow." The sting of death therefore is drawn; and we may adopt the language of the Apostle, "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

It is true, that many, who are ignorant of Christ, are enabled to brave death on a field of battle, and even to look forward to it with composure in its more gradual approaches. But in both cases they either put away the thought of God's judgment altogether, or deceive themselves with the idea that they are prepared to meet it. Let them only be undeceived respecting the state of their own souls, and the state to which alone the promises of salvation are attached, and the most stout-hearted man in the universe will tremble: and it is uniformly found, that those persons who most appear to disregard death, are most averse to hear of it, or to reflect on its consequences on the souls of men. It is the knowledge of Christ only that affords a Scriptural hope of acceptance with God; and therefore it is that alone which will enable us to view with comfort the approach of death.]

2. Make it an object of desire—

[St. Paul tells us that to whomsoever "it is Christ to live, it is also gain to die:" and he speaks of himself as "having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which he considered as far better" than the happiest state he could enjoy on earth. Would we know what it was that made death so desirable to him? he tells us; "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me." And in proportion as our views of Christ are clear, the same effects will follow: "We shall rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Who can hear that prayer of Christ's, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me may be with me, to behold that glory which thou hast given me;"

me;" who, I say, can hear this, and not long for its accomplishment? There may remain in us somewhat of a natural fear of dissolution; and a regard for our families may perhaps make us wish to prolong for a season our stay on earth: but when, like Stephen, we behold the Lord Jesus and the glories of the invisible world, we feel every other tie dissolved, and long to have "mortality swallowed up of life." We are like persons in a foreign land, who, after having formed many friendships there, are loth to quit it; but, feeling the stronger attractions of their own family and country, relinquish present comforts, in the hope and prospect of others more sublime. This is represented as the state of all who have made any progress in the Divine life; they are "looking for, and hasting to, the coming of the day of Christ^s." Some may enjoy more of triumph in their end, and others less; but the testimony of David is found almost universally true, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace^h."]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. In what manner we should approach God's Temple *below*—

[It is particularly noticed respecting this distinguished Saint, that "he came *by the Spirit* into the Temple." Thus was his mind prepared for those manifestations of the Saviour which he there received. And what is the reason that we come up so often to the House of God without any benefit to our souls? Is it not that we come thither merely in a customary formal way, perhaps from no better motive than curiosity, and never pray to God for his Spirit to accompany us thither? We do not go up with enlarged expectations: we do not even think of having Christ revealed to our souls. But why do we not expect to see Christ there? Has he not said, "Lo, I am with you *always* even to the end of the world?" And is not this the particular direction of God to his Ministers, "Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation comethⁱ?" Know then, Brethren, that, though you cannot see Christ in the flesh, you may by faith obtain a far brighter view of him, than that holy man enjoyed who embraced him in his arms: and if you would have such manifestations of him to your souls in the House of God, you must pray to God for his Spirit to accompany you to his House, and take away the veil from your hearts. "Be not straitened in yourselves, and you shall not be straitened in your God:" Only come hungering and thirsting after Christ, and you shall never be "sent empty away."]

2. In what way we may secure admission into his Temple *above*—

[There

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^h Ps. xxxvii. 37.

ⁱ Isai. lxi. 11.

[There is one great preparation for an entrance into heaven, and that is, a sight of Christ by faith. "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Without the knowledge of Christ no man can behold the face of God in peace. "There is no other foundation whereon any man can build," "nor any other name whereby any man can be saved." It was this which saved those who looked forward to him before his advent; and it is this which alone saves any since his advent. O that we duly considered this! How diligently should we then inquire, What are my views of Christ? How am I affected with them? Do they lead me to cast myself upon him? Do they enable me to rejoice in him? Do I under the influence of them look forward to the period of my dissolution as that which will introduce me to his more immediate presence, and to the consummation of all my hopes? Brethren, rest not in a mere nominal profession; be not content with calling Christ, Lord, Lord; but seek such views of him as shall transform you into his image, and make you meet for his glory.]

DCCLVIII.

MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Luke iii. 4—6. *It is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths strait. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made strait, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

THERE is an abruptness in the language of the Prophets, which, though it sometimes casts an obscurity over their writings, often gives them very peculiar force and energy. This may be noticed particularly in the passage referred to in our text. At the beginning of the fortieth chapter of his Prophecies, Isaiah, without any particular intimation of it, breaks forth into a distinct subject, which from that time occupies his chief attention. He has indeed in the preceding chapters occasionally spoken of the Redeemer's kingdom: but from the beginning of this chapter he almost loses sight of the deliverance from Babylon, and dwells, even in the primary sense of his words,

words, on the more important deliverance of men from their bondage to sin and Satan. He informs us (v. 1, 2.) that God had commissioned him to comfort his drooping people with assured prospects of his returning favour through the intervention of the Messiah. Then, passing over eight hundred years as scarcely more than a single day, he seems to himself to hear the very voice of Christ's forerunner, and to see *him*, occupied in preparing the Messiah's way: and then, with a confident expectation, that God's word should stand, he predicts the ultimate and universal establishment of the Messiah's kingdom.

The passage is quoted by St. Luke as actually fulfilled in the preaching of John the Baptist; and it may well be considered as of peculiar importance, since it is quoted by all the Four Evangelists. In considering it, we shall be led to shew,

I. What are the chief obstructions to our Redeemer's kingdom—

Some there were peculiar to the Apostolic age—

[*The Jews* were so attached to Moses and their law, that they could not endure any thing which appeared to weaken their authority, and to transfer the people's regard to any other teacher. Knowing that their religion was from God, and not aware that it was intended only to be of temporary duration, they accounted it the vilest blasphemy to speak of the Ministry of the one, or the authority of the other, being superseded.

They had also very erroneous notions of the Messiah's kingdom: they supposed he would be a great temporal Prince, who would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and raise their nation to the highest pinnacle of human grandeur. Hence they were quite indignant that a poor despised Nazarene, who had not a place where to lay his head, should pretend to call himself their Messiah.

These prejudices greatly obstructed the establishment of Christ's kingdom among them, and proved an almost insurmountable bar to their conversion.

Nor were *the Gentiles* in a state more favourable than the Jews. They were addicted to the vilest lusts, the grossest superstition, the most confirmed idolatry. The more learned among them were still further from the kingdom of God, and more hostile to it, on account of their philosophic pride, which led

led them to reject every thing which did not savour of human wisdom, and the Gospel especially, which appeared to them so repugnant to it. To be saved by a man who was crucified, and seemed therefore unable to save himself, was in their eyes a most flagrant absurdity.

Thus St. Paul informs us, that "the preaching of the cross was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness."]

But there are others, which are common to all ages—

[It is not needful to distinguish between the different parts of the imagery, whereby these obstructions are described; else we might see in the relations of pride, the stubbornness of passion, and the gloominess of despondency, a correspondence between the terms that are used, and the obstacles that are depicted. Certain it is, without intending to refine upon the text, that these are the most common impediments to the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom.

Men will not endure to be told that they are justly obnoxious to the wrath of God, and utterly incapable of saving themselves; and that all, the best as much as the worst, must be indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ for all their hope and all their salvation. *The pride of the human heart* rises against this, and turns from it with disgust. *The lusts and passions of men* also are averse to the dominion of Christ: they hate control: they will not submit to the restraints of the Gospel: to have them mortified, is like the plucking out of a right eye, or the cutting off of a right hand: the spiritual, as well as the fleshly, filthiness that is in us, pleads for indulgence: and every disposition of the mind, as well as every appetite of the body, sets itself against the authority of Christ, and rejects his yoke.

But besides these, which are the more obvious impediments to the Gospel, there are some others, which, though little noticed, are both powerful and common. There is in most men a tendency to despair. Whilst the unbelief of some leads them to despise the Gospel as an idle tale, in others it operates to keep them back from embracing it, under an idea that they never can be brought to the state it requires. Either their guilt appears too great to be forgiven, or their lusts too strong to be subdued, or their circumstances so peculiar, as not to admit of so great a change in all the habits of their life.

These are obstacles which we all feel in a greater or less degree; and which must be removed, before Christ can enter freely into our hearts.]

But

But that a view of these things may not discourage us, let us consider,

II. How they are to be removed—

As there were some peculiar obstacles in the Apostolic age, so were there also peculiar circumstances calculated to remove them—

[*The general expectation of the Messiah*, which prevailed about the time of his coming, certainly tended to prepare his way. *The preaching of John the Baptist*, who with holy firmness laid his axe to the root of Pharisaic pride and hypocrisy, awakened a great and general attention to religion^a, insomuch that many doubted whether he were not the Messiah himself. *The Ministry of Christ* also produced a general sensation through the Jewish land: the holiness of his life, the wisdom and authority of his words, and the number and beneficence of his miracles, wrought conviction upon the minds of thousands, and drove his enemies to the necessity of putting him to death, or of leaving him in the uncontrolled possession of universal influence. *The Ministry of the Apostles*, confirmed as it was by the descent of the Holy Ghost, by the gift of tongues, and by miracles unnumbered, had yet great effect: it bore down all opposition, and triumphed over the united powers of earth and hell. *The universal extension of the Roman empire* contributed also not a little to the facilitating of the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom; since it gave to the Apostles an easy communication both with Jews and Gentiles throughout the world, in almost every part of which the Jewish Scriptures had already prepared their way.]

But it is of more practical importance to shew how *our* difficulties are to be removed—

[As these are the same in every age, so the means of removing them are such as are open to the use of all. We need notice only two; and these are, *repentance* and *faith*. *Repentance* is the great leveller of all obstructions: it “humbles the loftiness of man,” and “brings into captivity every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ.” Wherever real penitence exists, it brings the soul into the dust before God. No longer is the Gospel deemed unnecessary or severe: the penitent sees, that without it he must inevitably perish. Whether he have been more or less moral, he is equally disposed to smite on his breast and cry for mercy. His vain conceits of his own goodness all vanish; and, instead of despising others as inferior to him in sanctity, he accounts himself rather “the chief of sinners.” And it deserves particular

^a Matt. iii. 5, 6,

ticular attention, that the Baptist himself prescribed this as the very first and principal means of smoothing the way for the reception of Christ^b.

The next means, and that which renders the other effectual, is *faith*. This, no less than repentance itself, is an universal leveller. If repentance brings down the hills and mountains, faith exalts the valleys, straitens the crooked paths, and smooths the rough. Wonderful indeed is the efficacy of humble faith: it dissipates at once all desponding fears: the things which appeared utterly insurmountable, now become plain and easy: the blood of Christ is acknowledged as sufficient to cleanse them from all sin; and the grace of Christ as sufficient to make them victorious over every enemy. It is remarkable that our blessed Lord, on his first entrance on his Ministry, united this with repentance, as the grand, the effectual expedient for establishing his kingdom in the world^c. And his Apostles after him continued to further his interests in the very same way: they preached everywhere "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."]

To stir us up to that exertion which is necessary, let us contemplate,

III. The blessed consequences of their removal—

The manifestation of Christ's glory is that which ever did, and ever shall, follow the removal of those things which have hitherto veiled him in obscurity.

See how it was on his first appearance—

[The clouds which surrounded him, concealed in a measure the bright effulgence of his rays: his humble birth, his mean appearance, the contempt and abhorrence in which he was held, all tended to cast a veil over his Divine Majesty: yet even then his own more immediate Disciples beheld his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father."]

See it more particularly after the day of Pentecost—

[Till that time his very Apostles saw but very imperfectly the nature of that kingdom which Christ came to establish: but when the Holy Ghost had opened their eyes, and had sealed their testimony on the hearts of others, what a splendor beamed from the countenance of our incarnate God! Then it was seen, that he who had been "crucified, was the Lord of glory," the brightness of the Father's glory, and the "express image of his person." Every eye looked to him: every heart trusted in him: every soul "received out of his fulness grace for grace." He was that object which, if I may

so

^b ver. 3.

^c Mark i. 15.

so speak, was the centre and circumference of the globe: in him all united; and beyond him none aspired. "In him the whole body of believers, collectively and individually, were complete."]

See it at this hour—

[Who is loved? who is honoured? who is served? who is glorified, wherever the Gospel prevails? who, but that adorable Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ? Those who once saw "no beauty or comeliness in him for which he was to be desired," now behold him as "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely." "He is truly precious" to their souls; and to call him "their friend and their beloved," is the highest object of their ambition, or, rather, the only thing about which they have any material concern. It is the same in every quarter of the world; it is the same amongst high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned: if "God have shined into their heart to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," they "determine to know nothing else," to "glory in nothing else:" "this is all their salvation, and all their desire."]

But who can tell what it shall be in the latter days?

[The text informs us, that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Hitherto, notwithstanding all the efforts that have been used to spread the Gospel, darkness very generally prevails, and the obstacles to the Redeemer's kingdom are but partially removed. But the day is near at hand, when "all nations shall serve him," and "all people shall know him from the least of them to the greatest." Yes, "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it;" and therefore it shall assuredly come to pass. Obstructions there are, no doubt, both great and numerous: but "before Zerubbabel the mountains shall become a plain." The extension of vital Christianity through the world is not more incredible than the establishment which it has already gained in the earth; especially when we consider, that, what has been already done, is, under God, the work of a few unlettered fishermen. O that that day may appear! O that "God would hasten it in his time!"]

CONCLUSION :

[As "a voice crying in this our wilderness," I would now say to you, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." He has entered into the world: he has established his kingdom among men; he now "stands and knocks at the door of your hearts," and desires admission into them. O think what is it
that

that obstructs his entrance into your hearts? Is it a proud conceit of your own goodness? Let this mountain be brought low, comparing your lives with the demands of God's holy law. Is it an inveterate love of sin, and of this present world? let it give way to penitence and faith, that your path may be plain and smooth. Is it a doubt of the practicability of your salvation? Rely on Christ: "all things are possible to him that believeth."

Perhaps you will say, that "a preparation of heart must be from the Lord:" true; but it must be sought by you in the daily exercise of meditation and prayer. If you need any incentive to these duties, do but reflect upon the benefits resulting from them: think of a revelation of Christ to your soul! think of his glory exhibited to the eyes of your mind, and shining with increasing brightness to the perfect day! think too in how little a time you will "see him as he is," and "be with him for ever!" Dearly beloved, beg of God to "take the stumbling-blocks out of your way:" he is the same gracious God as ever he was; and if you cry unto him "he will make an high-way for you, like as he did for Israel in the day that he brought them out of the land of Egypt^d;" he "will make darkness light before you, and crooked things strait: these things will he do unto you and not forsake you^e."]]

^d Isai. xi. 16.^e Isai. xlii. 16.

DCCLIX.

LIBERALITY TO THE POOR.

Luke iii. 10, 11. *And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*

IN order to understand the true meaning of any part of Scripture, the strictest attention must be paid to the context. If this rule be not observed, there is scarcely any thing which may not be sanctioned by the Inspired Volume; and the most contradictory positions may appear to stand on equal authority. Suppose, for instance, the question in our text be taken, as other apparently similar questions must be taken, namely, as an Inquiry into the way of Salvation; we shall make John the Baptist return an answer directly contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel.

Gospel. When the gaoler asked Paul and Silas, "What he must do to be saved?" they answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ^a." *This is the only true answer that can be given to that question; for "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved," but the name of Jesus Christ^b. But if we look into the context, we find that John the Baptist had been "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins^c;" or, in other words, had been preaching salvation by Jesus Christ, exactly as the apostle Peter, and indeed all the Apostles, did on the day of Pentecost^d. Then, seeing multitudes coming to him for baptism, and apprehending that the great majority of them were taking up a profession of religion upon very light and erroneous grounds, he cautioned them strongly against a presumptuous confidence on the one hand, or an unproductive and hypocritical profession on the other; and exhorted them, if they would not experience the fate of a barren tree, to "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance^e." In reply to this, the people ask, "What shall we do?" That is, *What fruits shall we bring forth*, in order to evince our sincerity^f? And the direction which John gives them, is an answer exactly suited to the occasion: it is to this effect;—'If you would approve yourselves sincere and upright in your profession of faith in the Promised Messiah, shew forth your faith by your works, and, above all, by an abounding exercise of love.'*

Having thus prepared our way by a view of the context, and having ascertained what the Baptist's design was in giving the people the direction in our text, we shall proceed to the more distinct consideration of his answer, and shall open to you,

I. Its import—

It

^a Acts xvi. 30, 31.

^b Acts iv. 12.

^c ver. 3.

^d See the people's inquiry, and Peter's answer, Acts ii. 37, 38.

^e ver. 7—9.

^f See the Greek, ver. 8—10. This will remove all doubt: for they adopt the very same term as John had used.

It is manifest that the direction given by him is figurative, and therefore not to be taken in its strict and literal sense. But we must not therefore imagine, that we are at liberty to disregard it, as though it had no force at all. There can be no doubt but that the Baptist intended to inculcate a very tender compassion towards our indigent fellow-creatures, and a very enlarged exercise of liberality for their relief. To obtain, with as much precision as the subject is capable of, the true import of his words, we shall adduce from other parts of Scripture, but especially from the writings of the same Evangelist,

1. Some other passages of similar tendency—

[First, we shall notice one or two that are also figurative^g — — — There can be no doubt but that these require a very high degree of liberality to the poor, since they were actually practised *in their strictest sense* by the first Christians^h — — — From these we may turn to others that are more plainⁱ — — — What an accumulation of words is there in the former of these passages to encourage our compliance with the precept; and what a gracious benediction in the latter! — — — To *the rich* there is an especial charge given to be bountiful^k; but it is not to them only that this duty belongs; but to those also who gain a daily subsistence by their manual labour^l. To all, according to their ability, it equally appertains; for, on the foresight of a dearth in Judea, all the disciples of Antioch, every one according to his ability, contributed instantly to their relief^m.]

2. Some examples which are set forth for our imitation—

[That of Zaccheus is particularly to our purpose, because he was just converted to the faith of Christ, and because our blessed Lord himself acknowledged this heavenly disposition to be an evidence of his having actually obtained acceptance with his Godⁿ — — — But the example of the Macedonian Churches is yet more pertinent; because it is an example, not of an individual, but of whole Churches; and those, not in a state of ease and opulence, but of great affliction and deep poverty; and because it is expressly set forth for the imitation of others, who are called up to imitate it, *in order to*
prove

^g Luke xii. 33, 34. & xiv. 12—14.

^h Acts ii. 44, 45. & iv. 32—37.

^k 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

^m Acts xi. 28—30.

ⁱ Luke vi. 38. & xi. 41.

^j Eph. iv. 28.

ⁿ Luke xix. 8, 9.

prove the sincerity of their love to Christ^o. By carefully comparing these several passages, we see clearly what our duty is: we are not required to burthen ourselves in order to ease others, but so to participate their burthens that they may partake of our ease^p: thus to “bear one another’s burthen is eminently to fulfil the law of Christ^q.”]

Having thus marked the import of the injunction in our text, we proceed to shew,

II. Its reasonableness—

The whole of God’s “law is good,” and the service it requires is reasonable. But the duty enjoined in our text, though arduous to a selfish mind, is particularly reasonable. For consider,

1. What obligations we owe to God for the superior comforts which we enjoy—

[It is God who assigns to all their lot, not only in respect to the situation in which they are born^r, but in all the changes, whether prosperous or adverse, which they experience through life^s. Whatever therefore we have above others, “it is God alone who has made us to differ^t.” And how eminently is this the case with respect to the ravages of war which during these last twenty years have desolated almost the whole of Europe, but have never reached our happy land! Compare our state with that of a great part of Germany at this present moment^u, and then say, whether a compassionate regard for our suffering fellow-creatures be not called for at our hands, and whether such an expression of it as our text requires, be at all unreasonable? Methinks, it is not possible to have even the most indistinct view of our obligations to God, without saying from our hearts, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?”]

2. What we ourselves should desire, if we were reduced to the state in which myriads of our fellow-creatures now are—

[It is not easy to place ourselves in the situation of persons of whom we hear only by report: but yet we may conceive what we ourselves should desire, and what we should think reasonable, if we were perishing with cold and nakedness and hunger, whilst others, embarked in the same cause with ourselves, were exempt from those sufferings, and were enjoying comparative ease and affluence: Should we

^o 2 Cor. viii. 1—4, 8, 9. ^p ib. ver. 13, 14. ^q Gal. vi. 2.

^r Acts xvii. 26, 28. ^s 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7. ^t 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^u This Sermon was preached in 1814, on occasion of a Collection for the Relief of the most-grievous Distresses in Germany.

not wish them to stand forth for our relief? Should we not think it reasonable, that their exertions should rise in proportion to our necessities, and that they should almost literally fulfil the precept in our text, the man who had two coats imparting to us who had none, and that he who had meat should do likewise? Let us adopt for our principle the golden rule, and "Do unto others, as we would they should do unto us."]

3. What our blessed Lord and Saviour has done for us—

[This is the consideration which St. Paul himself suggests in reference to this very point". O consider, "how rich he was" in the possession of his Father's glory; and how "poor he became," "not having so much as a place where to lay his head," but dying under the curse that was due to our sins. Consider too what his object was; namely, that we, who deserved to be in hell without a drop of water to cool our tongues, might through his poverty be rich, and possess all the glory of heaven. Does such love as this require no return? When this very Saviour tells us, that what we do unto the least of his brethren, he accepts as done to himself, shall we think any requisition hard, or any sacrifice too great? Truly, not only our property, but even our life itself, may well be sacrificed for him^{*}; and we should account ourselves happy in proportion as we have an opportunity to advance his glory in the world.]

But instead of dwelling any longer on the general reasonableness of this precept, we will proceed to notice,

III. Its suitableness to the present occasion—

[Rarely, if ever, has greater occasion for charitable exertions existed than at present[†]— — — Now therefore we might justly call upon you to comply with our text almost in the literal sense. But, waving that, we must urge you to adopt the *principle* that is there inculcated — — — and to bear in mind, that "he who soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Let every man do according as he is disposed in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver[‡]." Do not however forget the important distinctions with which we began the subject. It is to glorify Christ, and to shew the sincerity of your love to him, that

we

^{*} 2 Cor. viii. 9.

[†] 1 John iii. 16. Acts xxi. 13.

[‡] Here the particular occasion should be opened at considerable length.

^{*} 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7.

we invite you ;—not to purchase heaven by your alms. Bear that in mind ; and God will not forget it in the day of judgment.]

DCCLX.

PRACTICAL DUTIES ENFORCED.

Luke iii. 10—14. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then ? He answereth, and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do ? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do ? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely ; and be content with your wages.

WHATEVER want of human learning men may feel, they are, for the most part, well satisfied with their attainments in religious knowledge. If they are conscious of some faults, they do not suspect any want of just information, but only a defect in practising what they already know. But when persons begin to see their guilt and danger, they find that they need to be instructed in the very first principles of religion ; and they are glad to make inquiries, which formerly they would have utterly disdained. This was the effect produced by the Ministry of John the Baptist. The Scribes and Pharisees, being filled with self-conceit, rejected his word, and represented him as no better than a demoniac : but multitudes of others came to him with great solicitude, not to obtain answers to any speculative questions, but to ask, What they must do, to escape the wrath which he had so forcibly set before them.

We shall find it profitable to consider,

I. His answers to their inquiries—

Those who successively applied to him, and to whom he gave his answers, were,

1. The people—

[As these must of necessity comprehend a great variety
of

of characters, the Baptist gave his answer generally, so as to strike at the characteristic evil of our fallen nature, selfishness. The natural man lives neither for God nor for his fellow-creatures, but for himself alone. If he has great superfluities, he may without any difficulty give something to the poor and indigent: but if he has little more than bare necessities, he feels little, if any, responsibility for the use of them, and is chiefly occupied in making them subservient to his own comfort. From this selfish disposition innumerable evils proceed: indeed, it lies at the root of almost all evil. Hence the Baptist set himself in the first place to counteract it; and recommend in its stead the universal exercise of liberality and compassion.

That the Baptist's injunction should be taken according to the strict letter, we do not say: but, to give it any sense at all, it must imply far more than is commonly practised, or generally supposed to be our duty. The least it can mean is, that we should consider ourselves as stewards of all that we possess, and dispose of it conscientiously for the honour of God and the benefit of our fellow-creatures.]

2. The Publicans—

[The Publicans were persons appointed under the authority of the Roman Government to collect the taxes; and so odious was the office among the Jews, that few who had any regard for their own characters, would undertake it. Hence it was executed very generally in an unjust and oppressive manner; insomuch, that the office, which was at first, hated only on account of its evincing the subjection of the Jews to a foreign yoke, became proverbially infamous on account of the conduct of those on whom it was conferred.]

Among the candidates for baptism were some of these: and they likewise inquired, what they should do. Now it is worthy of observation, that John did not recommend them to give up their office, notwithstanding the difficulties and temptations that attended the execution of it; but only to guard against the evils that were commonly practised in the discharge of it. The greater the temptations to which they were exposed, the more desirable it was that the office should be filled by persons who were truly conscientious; and the more honour such persons would do to religion, by maintaining an unblemished character in such a post. His advice therefore to them was, to exact nothing beyond what they were authorized to demand, but to regulate their whole conduct agreeably to the laws of justice and equity.

This injunction however need not to be confined to them: it is equally applicable to all persons possessed of official authority,

authority, and indeed to all persons, whose interest might lead them in a way of trade or business to impose on others for their own advantage^a.]

3. The soldiers—

[The grace of God, which nothing can withstand, had reached the hearts of some of these: and they too made similar inquiries. To them also did the Baptist make a similar reply. Unfavourable as the life of a soldier is to the cultivation of piety, he did not tell them to get their discharge, but cautioned them against the evils incident to their profession. From their very education and mode of life, they are apt to disregard the feelings of men, and to injure or insult those who do not immediately comply with their wishes. In that age and country, it was also common for them to turn informers, that by false accusation they might share the fines that might be levied, or obtain bribes for exercising a pretended forbearance. Discontent and mutiny too were evils to which they were in general prone.

Against all of these practices the Baptist warned them. He testified that all such things were evil, and that every person must abstain from them, if he would avoid the wrath which hangs over the head of every impenitent transgressor.

But neither should these cautions be limited to those who made the inquiry, nor to persons engaged in the military life: for the duties of peacefulness, equity, and contentment are applicable to every situation, and every age — — —]

That these answers may appear in their proper light, we shall proceed to shew,

II. The suitableness of them to the occasion—

Certainly at first sight they appear defective, not to say, erroneous: for it never can be admitted for one moment that the correcting of those habits would procure everlasting salvation: such a reformation could make no atonement for their past sins, nor could it in any way supersede the necessity of believing in Christ. To understand the matter aright, we must consider what the import of their inquiries was, and what was the Baptist's more immediate office. John had told them all to "bring forth, (the word

^a The duties of *Custom-House Officers* might here be profitably insisted on, especially in places where several might be supposed to be present. But when pastoral fidelity leads us to make observations which may be considered as *personal*, we should be careful to make them with the utmost delicacy and tenderness.

word means, *do*,) to *do* fruits meet for repentance." They immediately inquire, each for himself, what are the particular things which they must *do*^b; that is, what they must *do* to evince the sincerity of their repentance? *This* is the question to which all his answers were directed. If it be thought that he should have begun to "preach Christ unto them," I answer, This was not his office, at least, not in the plain specific way in which the Apostles preached Christ on the day of Pentecost: he was rather "to *prepare the way* of the Lord;" and therefore he "preached only the baptism of *repentance*." Bearing these things in mind, his answer will be found precisely suited to the occasion. They were calculated to impress upon their minds the following truths:

1. Evil habits are an obstacle to the reception of the Gospel—

[Who does not see that the indulgence of their respective sins was calculated to blind their eyes and harden their hearts? Are persons, at the very time that they are addicted to the grossest immoralities, in a state fit to receive instructions in the sublime doctrines of the Gospel? Must not every word of it appear "foolishness unto them?" What was the effect produced on the worldly-minded Pharisees, when our Lord spoke of "making to ourselves friends of the unrighteous mammon?" We are told, "the Pharisees, *who were covetous*, heard all these things; and they *derided* him^d." And does not daily experience shew, that there must be a certain preparation of mind for the due reception of truth? If you cast the best seed that can be procured into land not broken up, but overgrown with briars and thorns, will you expect an harvest? So, if persons be not sufficiently convinced of the evil of their ways as to be willing to reform them in matters which unenlightened reason would condemn, there can be no hope that they will improve aright the sublimer truths of revelation.

The Baptist's answer then was precisely what you would give to a man, who by continued drunkenness had brought on a fever: 'I can recommend you to a physician, whose prescriptions will infallibly cure you; but it is in vain to go to him, if you do not determine to put away your habits of intoxication.']

2. The

^b ποιήσατε καρπὸς—τὴν ποιήσαμεν

^c Luke iii. 3, 4.

^d Luke xvi. 14.

2. The putting away of besetting sins is an indispensable evidence of our sincerity—

[The people professed to be penitent, and asked what they must do to prove it. Now can any one imagine that they could be sincere, if they were not willing to change their lives? What is repentance? It is not a mere sorrow for having subjected ourselves to God's displeasure; for then the devils, and those who have died in their sins, would be as great penitents as any: but repentance implies an hatred of sin, and a determination to forsake it: and consequently, the Baptist's injunctions afforded the people a proper test, whereby to ascertain the truth of their professions. If we at this day heard any one expressing a desire after salvation, and were informed that, notwithstanding the plainest warnings, he still held fast his iniquities, and would not part with them; should we give him credit for sincerity? No: we should tell him at once, that all his professions were mere hypocrisy, and that whatever he might pretend respecting a dependence on Christ, he would only deceive his own soul.]

3. The following of the light we have, is a good preparative for more light—

[A man brought out of a dungeon cannot bear at once the full blaze of the meridian sun; he must be brought to it by degrees: so neither can we bear at once the bright effulgence of Divine truth. Our blessed Lord told his Disciples, that "he had many things to say unto them, which they were not at that time able to bear:" and "he spoke the word in parables, *as the people were able to hear it.*" St. Paul adopted the same method of apportioning to his people his instructions according to their respective capacities; "giving milk to babes, and strong meat to those who were of full age." Had he not attended to this rule, he would have produced the same effects as would follow from a wrong administration of corporeal food; he would have destroyed those whom he designed to nourish: whereas by a more judicious conduct, he trained up the children for stronger food and higher attainments. Thus the Baptist directed his hearers to cultivate the acknowledged duties of humanity, honesty, and contentment: that in the exercise of these duties, they might gain a deeper insight into the evil of their past ways, and a fuller preparation of heart for a due reception of the Gospel.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. The importance of Ministerial fidelity—

[People in general love to have a Minister who will "prophesy unto them smooth things and prophesy deceits." But
what

what will be the end of such things? "If the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch?" It may be painful to us to hear the truth, when we are called to "pluck out a right eye, and to cut off a right hand:" but it is better far that we should be informed of our danger, than that we should be left to involve ourselves in irremediable ruin. We are told that many of the publicans and harlots actually repented, and became partakers of the kingdom of heaven. Did not *they* bless him? And will they not continue to bless God for him to all eternity? Do not then be grieved, if your Minister lay his axe to the root of your sins, if he "cry aloud, and spare not." It is his duty to do so; and if he forbear to warn you, "your blood will be required at his hands." He must "not use flattering words;" but must "commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." It is in that way only that he can "deliver his own soul," or hope to save the people committed to his charge.]

2. The need of mortifying our besetting sins—

[Every man has some sins to which he is more particularly addicted, or, at least, to which he is more exposed. His age, his situation, his employment in life, have some peculiar snares, against which he ought to guard. Every one therefore should inquire, what are the dangers to which he is more especially exposed. Persons advanced in life should examine themselves respecting querulousness: men of business should maintain a jealousy respecting worldliness and the frauds of trade: young people should watch over the vanity of their minds, and the violence of their passions. In short, the inquiry of every one should be, What have *I* to guard against? What have *I* to do? What are the chief obstacles to *my* advancement in religious knowledge, and to *my* attainment of everlasting happiness? Happy indeed would it be, if we were thus intent, every one on his own particular case! and happy would it be, if, having found out our besetting sins, we could say with the Psalmist, "I have kept myself from *my* iniquity!" Doubtless there is much beyond this: this is only the threshold of the sanctuary: but it is a threshold which we must pass over, before we can get within the veil. It is not our concern at present to expatiate upon the Divine life, as it is experienced by the advanced Christian: we are now only preaching, like John, the baptism of repentance; reserving to other occasions the fuller delineation of the Gospel salvation. But we shall have attained no trifling object, if the drunkard, the swearer, the whoremonger, or any other person,

son, be led to see, that, till he has put away his besetting sins, he can no more go to heaven, than Satan himself be brought there from the depths of hell.]

3. The moral tendency of the Gospel—

[The things insisted on by John, are mere preliminaries: instead of being the whole Gospel, they are only an introduction to the Gospel. The Gospel itself is not satisfied with a renunciation of evil habits; it requires also the cultivation of good ones; not to put away selfishness, dishonesty, and discontent, but to live altogether above this world, and to be ready even to “lay down our lives for the brethren.” It does not call us to believe in Christ, in order that we may afterwards indulge in sin; but that our hearts may be purified by faith, and that we may be transformed into the very image of our God.

See then who are the true *Antinomians*: not they who urge you to come to Christ for life and salvation, but they who tell you that to be honest and just, and sober and charitable, is all that is required of you. With such persons it is common to quote those words of Balaam, “Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.” But they quite forget the walking humbly with God; and then confine the doing justice and loving mercy, to a few outward acts. Give the full scope to these words, and they do contain the whole of our duty: but we must omit no part of them: nor must we reduce any part to the puny standard of Pharisaic morality. Look at Christ and his Apostles, and there we see the morality which we are to aspire after. Those who are inquiring after Christ, do well to ask, What shall I do? but those who profess to have believed in Christ, must rather ask, “What do I more than others?”]

* Matt. v. 47.

DCCLXI.

THE IMPRISONMENT OF JOHN.

Luke iii. 19, 20. *Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added this above all, that he shut up John in prison.*

THE Inspired Volume, when considered only as containing a history of other ages and other nations, is read rather for the purpose of informing the mind,
than

than of benefiting the heart; and hence it produces comparatively little effect even on those who are most conversant with its contents. But the true light in which it should be regarded is, as *a history of man*, to whatever age or nation he may belong. It is a *mirror*, that reflects the human heart in all its dispositions, and in all its actings: and, when viewed in this light, it acquires a ten-fold greater importance, because it exhibits us to ourselves, and makes *us* the actors in all that is done.

In reading an account of John the Baptist, and of his imprisonment by Herod, we feel but little interest, except as we condemn the licentiousness of Herod, and commiserate the fate of his faithful Monitor. But if we would divest ourselves of the idea that it passed many centuries ago, and consider the transaction as having recently occurred in our own neighbourhood, we should almost of necessity be led to contemplate it in a more general view, and to notice in it *the power and malignity of sin*. It is in that view that I propose to call your attention to it at this time.

Let us take occasion then to remark from it,

I. The power of sin—

Wonderful indeed is its power to blind, to enslave, to harden all in whom it dwells—

1. It blinds—

[Herod could not but know, that it was wrong for him to take his brother Philip's wife. Yet doubtless he contrived by some vain excuses to justify it to himself. And thus it is that every sinner deludes himself. In some cases, he denies the criminality of his actions altogether, "calling evil good, and good evil, and putting darkness for light, and light for darkness". Where they cannot altogether hide from themselves the evil of their ways, they find some excuse, either from their constitutional propensities, or the habits of all around them, or some peculiarity in their situation at the time. "They feed on ashes; and yet to such a degree hath a deceived heart turned them aside, that they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Whatever be the particular lust of which they are enamoured — — — it is
"Satan

* Isai. v. 20.

^b Isai. xliv. 20.

"Satan that hath blinded their eyes^c;" they walk in the vanity of their mind, "having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts^d:" and "they know not whither they go, because that darkness hath blinded their eyes^e."]

2. It enslaves—

[Though Herod was willing to "do many things," and forbear many things respecting which he was admonished by John, he could in no wise be prevailed on to part with his incestuous consort. And thus it is with sinners of every description: there are some sins to which they have but little inclination, and which therefore they may be induced to renounce: but their besetting sin they cannot find it in their hearts to mortify, so addicted are they to the commission of it, and, as it were, "tied and bound with it as with a chain," which they cannot break^f— — Whilst they see, and cannot but acknowledge the sinfulness of their habits, they have a "law in their members warring against the law in their minds, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin which is in their members^g;" or rather, they are "taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will^h."]

3. It hardens—

[One would have supposed that when Herod, "knowing that John was a holy and just man, feared" him, he would never have been induced to persecute him for his fidelity. Yet of his own mind he had imprisoned John, and would have put him to death, had he not been restrained by his fear of the people; and, when solicited by his daughter to give her John's head in a charger, he sent an executioner to behead him, and presented it to her according to her desire. This he did for his oath's sake. But how could any oath bind him to the commission of murder? He would have found ample means of inducing her to alter her request, if sin had not "searedⁱ his conscience," and "made his heart as adamant." But sin is of its own nature progressive: and to such a degree do men become "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," that evils, which once they could not have contemplated as possible ever to be committed by them, are committed easily and without remorse. Hazael, when warned of the enormities which he would one day commit, exclaimed, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do such things?" Yet he afterwards executed these things to the full extent of the predictions concerning him. And if the future conduct

^c 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^d Eph. iv. 18.

^e 1 John ii. 11.

^f See this, in the Drunkard, the Whoremonger, &c. &c.

^g Rom. vii. 23.

^h 2 Tim. ii. 26.

conduct of many, who are now but just beginning their career of sin, were opened to their view, they would not believe that they should ever attain to such inpiety. But, what is said of strife, may be said of every other sin; namely, that "the beginning of it is like the letting out of water:" the breach at first is small; but it soon widens, till the inundation becomes irresistibly powerful, and irremediably destructive.]

Such is the power of sin; of which in the history we may yet further see,

II. The malignity—

It tends to inflict misery,

1. On all who indulge it—

[Look at Herod in the midst of all his indulgences: was he happy? Which of the two, I would ask, was the happier; Herod, in the midst of his excesses, or John, when bound with chains in prison for righteousness sake? No one, I think, can entertain a doubt. The truth is, that sin and misery are indissolubly connected even in this life; according as the Apostle, speaking of the ungodly, has said, "Destruction and misery are *in* their ways, and the way of peace have they not known!" Take the adulterer, for instance: You may suppose him as happy as his heart can wish. But what is Job's account of him? "The eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me; and *he disguiseth his face*. In the dark they dig through houses which they had marked for themselves in the day-time. *They know not the light*: for the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: *if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death*." And of the wicked generally, Eliphaz says, "The wicked man travellet with pain all his days: a dreadful sound is in his ears: he believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword!" Yes, an evil conscience will so haunt a man, that he shall be afraid to go out into the dark, or almost even to look under his bed: so truly is it said, "The way of transgressors is hard^m." There are indeed those who will profess to feel no apprehensions: but we are assured by the heart-searching God, that their boastings are vain: for "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt: there is no peace, saith my God, to the wickedⁿ."]

2. On the world at large—

[See what misery the gratification of Herod's lusts produced;

^l Rom. iii. 16, 17.

^k Job xxiv. 15—17.

^j Job xv. 20—22.

^m Prov. xiii. 15.

ⁿ Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

duced ; on Philip, whose wife he took ; on Herodias, whose mind and conscience he so defiled ; on John, whom for his fidelity he murdered ; and on all the Church of God, whom he thus deprived of a faithful counsellor and instructor. But he cared not what evils he inflicted, if only he might have his own licentious passions gratified. And who can tell what miseries the seducer inflicts upon his hapless victim ; and the adulterer, on the object of his unlawful desires ? — — — The same may be spoken of the ambitious man, who wades through seas of blood to the attainment of fame and power — — — May I not mention the scoffer too, who hates and derides all serious piety, and cares not how many souls he ruins, provided he may but indulge his enmity against God and his Christ ? — — — But what is it that has turned the whole world into one vast theatre of contention and sorrow ? It is sin, which has established its empire on the ruins of peace and love. Nor is there to be found a nation, or family, or individual, whose happiness has not suffered from this malignant evil.]

From this subject we may yet further LEARN,

1. The danger of indulging sin—

[Who shall say whither one sinful thought shall carry us ? Little did Herod imagine to what the first desire which he formed after Philip's wife would lead him. And little did David anticipate the results of the first glance which he caught of Bathsheba. Say not then, of a sinful thought or desire, that it is little : but learn to flee from it as from the face of a serpent ; and let every declension from the path of duty be viewed by you as a step towards hell itself — — —]

2. The duty of reproving it—

[We are not all called to act like John, and to obtrude our remarks on the ears of kings and princes. But a holy fidelity becomes us all in our respective spheres. We must take care indeed that we do not reprove others in a wrong spirit. There are many circumstances wherein silence may be the most effectual reproof. But a holy fortitude becomes us all. We must all be witnesses for God in the place where we live, and shine as lights in a dark world. And if for our fidelity we be called to suffer, as John suffered, we must rejoice that we are so honoured of our God, and be willing to lay down our own lives, if only we may save the souls of others.]

DCCLXII.

THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT UPON CHRIST.

Luke iii. 21, 22. *Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened; and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.*

IN every part of our Lord's history, from his first entrance into the world to his dissolution upon the cross, we observe an astonishing combination of the most opposite events: we see the majesty of heaven degraded to the lowest depths of humiliation; and the meanest of mankind, who was "a worm, and no man, the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people," exalted to the highest honours that Heaven itself could confer upon him. Observe the circumstance of his birth: what can we conceive more degrading than for the Saviour of the world to be born in a stable, and to be laid in a manger? Yet, to counterbalance this, angels were sent to announce his advent, and a star to point out to the inquiring Magi the place of his nativity. Thus it was also at his baptism. The ordinance of baptism was intended to intimate the need which we have to be washed from our sins: Jesus, therefore, could not submit to baptism without acknowledging, in appearance, that he was a sinner, like unto us: nevertheless, for wise and gracious reasons, he insisted that that rite should be administered to him. But whatever ignominy might attach to him on this account, the offence was completely rolled away by the interposition of his God and Father, who on that occasion bore testimony to him by an audible voice from heaven, and by a visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon him. These are the two subjects for our present consideration. We notice,

I. The

I. The *visible* descent of the Holy Ghost upon him—

There are many things relative to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, which are worthy of observation—

1. The *time* of it was remarkable—

[*Jesus had just conformed to God's ordinance* of baptism. Though he had no need of baptism, (not having any sin to wash away,) yet, as it was a rite instituted by God for the introducing of men into the Messiah's kingdom, he judged it expedient to comply with it himself, that he might "fulfil all righteousness" in his own person, and be in all things a pattern to his followers. This was well pleasing to God, who cannot but be interested in the observance of his own ordinances. And the conferring of so distinguished an honour upon Jesus on that occasion clearly shews, that "God will honour those who honour him;" and that in a reverential attendance on the instituted means of grace, we may expect blessings which we shall in vain hope for in the neglect of them ^a.

He was, moreover, actually engaged in prayer. On three different occasions did the Father bear testimony to Jesus by an audible voice from heaven; and every time was either in, or immediately after, prayer ^b. What an evidence does this afford us of the importance and efficacy of prayer! And who that lives nigh to God in the exercise of that duty, has not found that promise realized, "Thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am ^c?" Audible voices, indeed, we are not to expect; but we are sure that "God has never said to any, Seek ye my face in vain."]

There was something peculiar also in *the manner* of it—

[It was of great importance that the attestation thus publicly given to the character of Jesus should be such as could admit of no doubt. Accordingly "the heavens were opened," just as they afterwards were at the time of

^a Those who absent themselves from the House of God under the idea that they can spend their time more profitably at home, and those who stay away from the Lord's table under an apprehension of their unworthiness to go to it, would do well to consider this.

^b At his baptism (see the text), at his transfiguration (Luke ix. 29, 35.), and just before his death (John xii. 28.)

^c Isai. lviii. 9. & lxxv. 24.

of Stephen's death^d, so that the very throne of God, as it were, became visible to mortal eyes; and the Holy Ghost descended visibly, in a bodily appearance, and abode upon him. Whether the Holy Ghost assumed the shape of a dove, or only appeared in a luminous body with a hovering motion, like that of a dove, we do not take upon us to determine^e; but the appearance was such as could leave no doubt in the minds of the spectators that there was a special communication to Jesus from heaven, even such a communication as had never before been vouchsafed to mortal man.]

But *the ends* of the Spirit's descent are most worthy of our attention—

[We are sure that it was designed to *confirm the Baptist's mind*. The Providence of God had so ordered events, that John and Jesus, though related to each other, had lived thirty years in the world without forming any acquaintance with each other. Had they been intimate with each other, it might have been thought that an agreement had been formed between them to deceive the world: but John had no knowledge of the person of Jesus, till he was inspired to point him out as "the Lamb of God, that was to take away the sin of the world:" and this very sign was promised to John, as the means whereby his mind should be satisfied that the testimony which he had borne was true: and John himself declares, that his own conviction of Christ's Messiahship was grounded on this very thing^f.

But there was another end, even *the inauguration of the Messiah himself* to his high office. The Jewish kings and priests, and in some instances the prophets also, were anointed with oil at the time of their consecration to their work: and therefore it behoved Jesus, in whom all these offices were to be combined, to be set apart for them by a nobler unction. Accordingly he was "anointed with the oil of joy and gladness above his fellows^g." It had been expressly foretold that he should be so anointed^h, and that "the Holy Spirit should rest upon himⁱ;" and he himself mentioned, in his very first sermon, that these prophecies were then accomplished; and that he was then executing the very office for which he had been commissioned and qualified by that peculiar unction^k.]

Besides

^d Acts vii. 55, 56.

^e We rather think the latter. See Doddridge on the place.

^f John i. 32—34.

^g Ps. xlv. 7.

^h Isai. lxi. 1.

ⁱ Isai. xi. 2.

^k Luke iv. 17—21.

Besides this visible attestation to his character, we are called to notice also,

II. The *audible* testimony of the Father to him—

In many different ways did the Father bear witness to his Son: every miracle that was wrought by Jesus was a seal whereby the Father attested the truth of his Divine Mission. But on this occasion he addressed his Son by an audible voice; and therein bore witness to,

1. His person as the promised Messiah—

[The Messiah had been long foretold under the character of “the Son of Man¹:” and that term was understood by the Jews as equivalent to the Son of God^m. That Jesus did indeed sustain this character, and that he was the very person of whom all the Prophets spake, was a point to be proved; and God determined that it should be proved by every species of evidence that could be adduced. Hence, besides the foregoing proof which was offered to the eyes of men, another was added which appealed to their ears. And in the very words which are used, there seems a reference to the prophecies which were accomplished in him. “Thou art *that* my beloved Son,” *that* Son, whose advent has been so long foretold, and so long expectedⁿ. In this view the expression of the text precisely corresponds with that which had been long before used by the prophet Isaiah: “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth: *I have put my Spirit upon him*; HE shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles^o.” Whatever pretensions, therefore, false Christs may urge, or whatever objections infidel professors of Christianity may raise against Jesus, we have the infallible testimony of God himself that Jesus is the Christ.]

2. His acceptableness in that office—

[In every view the Father could not but feel complacency and delight in him. As voluntarily undertaking the mediatorial work, as richly qualified for the discharge of it, and as persevering in it notwithstanding all the difficulties that he should have to encounter, he must be highly acceptable to the Father. But God foresaw the perfect accomplishment of all his designs through the ministration of

¹ Dan. vii. 13.

^m Luke xxii. 69, 70.

ⁿ There is a force in the repetition of the article, which, though lost in the Translation, should not be overlooked.

^o Isai. xlii. 1.

of his dear Son: he saw, as it were, all his elect delivered from their guilt and misery, and made partakers of everlasting glory and felicity: he saw all his own perfections also honoured and exalted in the mystery of redemption: and he cordially approved of it as the most stupendous effort of wisdom and of love. None can henceforth entertain a doubt whether he will accept those who come to him by Christ, since it was on account of the suitableness and sufficiency of his atonement that the Father was so "well pleased in him."]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. How we should think of God—

[We know nothing of God except from revelation. It is presumptuous, therefore, either to form notions about him from our own vague conjectures, or to refuse our assent to the representations which he has given us of himself. That there is a Trinity of the persons in the Godhead is doubtless an incomprehensible mystery; but it is plainly revealed in numberless passages of Scripture. It is indeed from other passages that we know each of the persons in the Trinity to be God: but that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are Three distinct persons, is as clear as any truth can be: and so clearly is it intimated in the very words of our text, that the ancients were wont to say, "Go to Jordan, and there learn the doctrine of the Trinity."]

2. How we should act towards him—

[All that is required of us is, to be like-minded with God. Did God point him out as his beloved Son? let us believe in him as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Did the Father profess himself well pleased in him? let us delight ourselves in him: let it be the joy of our hearts to contemplate his fulness and sufficiency, and to be receiving out of his fulness grace for grace. Let us, in short, "count all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and glory in him as all our salvation, and all our desire.]

DCCLXIII.

OUR LORD'S FIRST SERMON AT NAZARETH.

Luke iv. 21, 22. *And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness,*

witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

THE Sabbath was appointed as a day of rest; yet not altogether for the rest of the body, but that the soul might be the more at leisure to acquaint itself with God. In this view it is a most gracious and merciful appointment; because, the time being fixed, all are disengaged at once, and ready both to serve their God together, and to receive instruction respecting their duty towards him. Our blessed Lord, after he had entered upon his Ministry, employed *every* day in the execution of his work: but he availed himself especially of the opportunity which the Sabbaths afforded him, to instruct the people. At Nazareth, where he had been brought up, “he went into their synagogue, as his custom was;” and being called upon to read the portion of Scripture appointed for the day, he stood up and read a passage from the prophecies of Isaiah; and then sat down to expound it. His exposition or comment is not given us: but the substance of it is set before us, in few, but comprehensive, words.

It is our intention to consider,

I. His comment on the Scripture—

When he told the people, that on that very day the passage which he had read to them was fulfilled in their ears, we must suppose him to have spoken to this effect:

I am the person whom the Father has sent—

[From my mean appearance you will be ready to think that I can have no pretensions to the office of the Messiah: but it is of me that the Prophet speaks in the words which I have now read; I am the person on whom the Spirit has been poured out; “the Lord hath anointed ME, and sent ME” to instruct and save the world.]

And this is the commission which I am come to execute—

[“The poor” are the special objects of my attention; they being particularly “chosen of my Father to be rich
in

in this world, and heirs of my kingdom." Yet, if any be "poor in spirit," and sensible of their low and lost estate, to them am I sent; and to declare to them the glad tidings of salvation, is the delightful work which I have undertaken.

More particularly, if any be "broken-hearted" with a sense of guilt and misery, I am come "to heal" them by an application of my blood and Spirit to their souls: their guilt will I remove by my all-atoning blood; and their misery, by sending them my Holy Spirit to be their comforter and guide—— It is not as a temporal prince or conqueror that I am come: my conquests are altogether of a spiritual nature; but they are irresistible, and shall be complete. Are any persons so blinded by Satan, and enslaved by sin, that they appear like captives, immured in a dungeon, and bereft of sight, and galled with massive chains^a? I am come to set them free, not only breaking off their fetters, and restoring them^t to the light, but renewing even their organs of vision, and bringing them into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God—— And this I shall do, not by war and bloodshed, but by an exhibition of truth to their souls. The word is my sword, and the ministry of it is that chariot in which I will ride on, conquering and to conquer, till every enemy be put under my feet^b——

In a word, you all know what is done in the year of jubilee, how debts are cancelled, slaves are liberated, and inheritances are restored: such are the benefits which I impart: I proclaim the arrival of that happy period, at least as far as respects the souls of men. Whatever debt of sin any man may owe, it shall be forgiven him: his bondage, however severe, shall be brought to an end: and his inheritance, however justly forfeited, shall be restored to him, even all the inheritance of heaven——

Thus circumstantially has the Prophet described *my* office, which already I have begun to execute: "This very day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears:" and all of you who will believe in me, shall enjoy the benefits I am come to bestow.]

Such we may suppose to have been our Saviour's comment on the Scripture which he had read. Let us next view;

II. The effect produced by it—

This

^a This was a common mode of treating captives. Sampson was so treated by the Philistines (Judg. xvi. 21.), and Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kin. xxv. 7.)

^b Thrice is it said, "He hath sent me to preach."

This was far different from what might have been expected: yet it will afford much instruction to us—

1. They listened—

[No sooner had he read the passage, than “the eyes of all were attentively fixed on him.” The sublimity of the words, and the impressive energy with which they were read, engaged their attention, and made them very desirous of hearing what this celebrated teacher should deduce from them.

Happy would it be, if this eagerness to receive instruction were more visible amongst us. But, in general, when a Minister has read the words which he proposes to explain, many, instead of putting forth all the powers of their minds to understand and apply the subject, compose themselves in the most easy posture, and sink habitually into listlessness and indifference; satisfied with having performed a duty, though they reaped not the smallest benefit—— But consider, the word which you hear, though spoken by a sinful man like yourselves, is, as far as it is agreeable to the mind and will of God, to be regarded “not as the word of man, but as the word of God.” “We are ambassadors for Christ; we speak to you in Christ’s stead; and God himself beseeches you by us.” Whenever, therefore, you hear the Scriptures explained, you should, like the Centurion and his friends^c, receive the word with all humility of mind, and treasure it up in your memory for the regulating of your hearts and lives———]

2. They wondered—

[Their wonder arose, in part, from their recollection of his parentage and education, which appeared to them ill suited to his high pretensions. But, in part also, it arose from the suavity of his manner, and the exalted nature of his discourse, to which they could not but “bear witness.” And well indeed might they wonder that such a messenger should be sent from heaven, and that such blessings should be imparted unto men.

But alas! the very same truths delivered amongst us are heard with indifference: yea, though opened in the fullest manner, and exhibited in the clearest light, they are regarded as uninteresting speculations, if not as an idle tale. The work and offices of Christ may be explained, and all the wonders of Redeeming Love be opened to our

view,

^c Acts x. 33.

view, and yet no admiration be excited; yea, the talents of the speaker may be admired, and the subject itself be overlooked. But would this be the case if men felt their need of this salvation?—— No, surely: they would be filled with rapture, and adore their God all the day long——]

3. They disobeyed—

[Much as they were struck with the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, they could not overcome their prejudices. They had but lately seen him following the humble occupation of a carpenter, and they could not conceive that such an one could possibly be the Messiah. Hence they did not receive his testimony: hence also, when warned of the danger of rejecting him, and of God's determination to communicate to the Gentiles those blessings which they despised, they burned with rage against him, and sought to destroy him.

Alas! how common a character is this! How many are there who hear, and to a certain degree approve, the Gospel, while yet they are not effectually changed by it! They are still under the dominion of prejudice and passion; and sit in judgment on the Gospel, instead of yielding obedience to it. The sublimity of its doctrines is a stumbling-block to them; and the purity of its precepts an offence. What is gratifying to their feelings they will receive; but whatever tends to the mortifying of their pride or the subduing of their besetting sins, they will not endure——

O that the example before us may put us on our guard! This day is this Scripture fulfilled in our ears, as truly as in the day that Jesus read them in the synagogue. Jesus is still the anointed Saviour: still does he retain and execute the commission given him by the Father: still does he "say to the oppressed, Go free:" the captive that is bruised with chains, and deprived of sight, and broken-hearted with a sense of his sorrows, may even now be restored to sight, and liberty, and joy. Our adorable Saviour is ever ready to give him "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"——

Beloved Brethren, "receive not this grace in vain;" neither be contented with a partial approbation of the Gospel: but surrender up yourselves unfeignedly and unreservedly unto the Lord; ever dreading, lest your misimprovement of the light afforded you should provoke him to remove your candlestick, and to transfer your advantages to others.]

DCCLXIV.

THE CALL OF MATTHEW.

Luke v. 27, 28. *After these things, he went forth, and saw a publican named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house.*

IF we notice particularly who they are whom God has more especially selected as objects of his grace and mercy, we shall be struck with this plain and obvious truth, that "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; nor his ways as our ways." Had it been left to *man* to dispense the blessings of salvation, he would have imparted them to those whose previous qualifications and endowments seemed to have marked them out for this high distinction. But God has rather sought, by the preference which he has shewn, to magnify his own grace and mercy.

The person here chosen to the apostleship was a "publican." Now the publicans were characters universally hated by the Jewish nation, because, as tax-gatherers, they aided the Roman Government, by whom they were appointed, and whose interests they served. The persons who executed this office, knowing that, independently of their own character, they were hated and despised by their brethren, were intent only on advancing their own interests, and were guilty of exacting in many cases more than they were authorized to require; and thus by their oppressive conduct they rendered the office, and all who held it, objects of unqualified reprobation. Yet of these persons did God select many, in preference to the scribes and Pharisees, to participate the benefits of the Redeemer's kingdom; as our blessed Lord himself says, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you^a." The person whom
our

^a Matt. xxi. 31.

our text mentions as executing that office, is here called “**Levi:**” but in his own account which he gives of himself, he calls himself by the name of **Matthew**^b Of his conversion we are informed in the words before us. He was “sitting at the receipt of custom,” in the regular discharge of his duty, and, without any previous intimation or instruction, was called by our blessed Lord to a constant attendance upon him, as one of his Disciples. This event will be found deeply interesting to us all, whilst we consider,

I. His unexpected call—

In this there was doubtless somewhat peculiar. He was called to an office which was limited to twelve, and which now no longer exists. But still, excepting that peculiarity,

1. The same call is given to every one of us—

[To us the Gospel speaks in the same authoritative tone as that in which Jesus addressed this busy publican: and in it the Lord Jesus Christ himself says to every one of us, “Follow me.” ‘Believe in me as the true Messiah: receive me as sent of God to be the Saviour of your soul: give yourself up to me as your Lord and Master: obey my commandments, and tread in my steps. Let no present considerations operate to retard your compliance with my will: come, leave all, and follow me.’ In all this there is nothing peculiar: it is the duty of every living man: the command is issued equally to all: “If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”— — —]

2. Wherever it is effectual, it is equally the gift of sovereign grace—

[To Matthew, the call came unexpected and unsought: and so it does in reality wherever it takes effect. The precise time of its operation may not, in all cases, be so distinctly seen, nor its power so deeply felt; but in all cases must its efficacy be traced to God, who, of his own good pleasure, dispenses his gifts to whomsoever he will. There may in some cases be a long season of gradual illumination, even as the early dawn, whose transition from darkness to light is imperceptibly progressive: but still, if we trace it

to.

^b Matt. ix. 9.

to the first thought and first desire originating in the soul, we must without hesitation ascribe it altogether to God, who "gives both to will and to do of his good pleasure^c." Of all true converts it must be said, "Ye have not chosen me; but I have chosen you^d:" "You loved me, because I first loved you^e:" You did not "know me, till after you were known of me^f;" or "apprehend me, till you had first been apprehended by me^g." In reference to you all it must in this sense be said, no less than of St. Matthew himself, "I am found of them that sought me not; I am made manifest to them that asked not after me^h." Whatever "holy desires we feel, or good counsels we follow, or just works we perform," they all, as our Liturgy informs us, "proceed from God;" who, as our Tenth Article states it, "by his grace in Christ Jesus *prevents* us, that we may have a "good will, and worketh with us when we have that good will."]

That this call of Matthew may have its due effect upon us, let us consider,

II. His exemplary obedience to it—

As in the call itself, so in his obedience to it, there was somewhat peculiar. The office which he had held he instantly resigned, (committing it no doubt to proper hands,) and became from that moment a stated attendant on our Lord. In this respect it is not necessary that we should follow him, unless the occupation in which we have been engaged be criminal. We are rather to "abide in the calling in which we have been called:" yea, "therein to abide with Godⁱ." But in other respects our obedience must resemble his. It should be,

1. Prompt—

[There was in him no "conferring with flesh and blood." Elisha, when Elijah's mantle was cast upon him^k, felt an irresistible attraction, and obeyed without hesitation or delay. So it should be with us. Does the Lord Jesus by his word and Spirit command us to follow him? We should not wait for a second call: we should so act, that

we

^c Phil. ii. 13.

^d John xv. 16.

^e 1 John iv. 19.

^f Gal. iv. 9.

^g Phil. iii. 12.

^h Isai. lxx. 1.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vii. 20, 24.

^k 1 Kin. xix. 19—21.

we may be able to say with David, "I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments" — — —]

2. Self-denying—

[Lucrative as his situation was, Matthew resigned it without reluctance, determining that nothing should obstruct him in the path of his duty. And should not we also despise all earthly gains or prospects in comparison of Christ? Should we not be ready to shake them from us, as we would "the thick clay from our feet" when we were about to run a race^m? — — — Yes verily, we should be ready to "leave all to follow Christ;" and account not even life itself dear to us, if only we may honour him by the sacrifice of itⁿ — — —]

3. Grateful—

[Immediately Matthew made a great feast for his Divine Master, and invited to it a number of his former friends, who were still prosecuting the line which he had just relinquished. In this he sought to honour his Lord in the face of the whole world, and to advance the interests of His kingdom, by bringing others to the knowledge of him. This, under any circumstances, was a just expression of his gratitude for the mercy vouchsafed unto him. And it shews us how we also should use our influence, when once we have become the followers of our Lord. We should not only not be ashamed to confess him openly before men, but should exert ourselves to bring our friends and relatives to an acquaintance with him, that they also may be made monuments of his grace, and become partakers of the blessings which we enjoy. Our very feasts should now be ordered with that view, and be made conducive to that end. Nor should we make any account of either expense or trouble, if we may but testify in the smallest degree our love to Christ, or advance the ends for which he came into the world — — —].

4. Determined—

[We never read of his expressing a wish afterwards to return to his former employment, or of his regretting that he had made so great a sacrifice. Nor should we ever "look back, after having once put our hand to the plough." The Patriarchs, who had left their country and their kindred at the call of God, "had opportunities enough to return, if they had been so minded;" but they "looked forward to a heavenly country,"

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 60.

^m Hab. ii. 6.

ⁿ Acts xx. 24. Phil. i. 20.

^o Luke ix. 62.

country^p,” and to their dying hour pursued their pilgrimage towards it with unabated ardour. And we also must go forward in a sweet and assured hope, that in the place of all that we resign or lose for Christ, we shall have “a better and an enduring substance in heaven^q” — — —]

REFLECT,

1. How strongly does this example reprove the whole Christian world !

[We are all called as he was, and have been called ten thousand times, to serve and follow Christ: But on whom amongst us have the same effects been produced? Who has not had many excuses to offer for declining to accept the invitations of his Lord? — — — I may even say, who, if his own friend or relative had acted as Matthew did, would not have been ready to cry out against him as a weak deluded enthusiast? But this call must be obeyed, if ever we would be acknowledged by our Lord as his obedient^r people. I do not say that we must *actually* renounce all our worldly interests for Christ; but this I say, that *we must be ready to renounce* them, if they interfere with our duty to him, or if by the surrender of them we may more advance his glory in the world. On no other terms will he receive us: if we be not willing to “lose father and mother, and houses and lands, yea, and our own lives also for his sake, we cannot be his disciples.” O that his power might now go forth amongst you, as it did in the case before us; and that all your “souls may be subdued to the obedience of faith!”]

2. How great is the benefit of obeying the Gospel call!

[Matthew in appearance was degraded and impoverished; but he was made an eminent servant of Christ, and a blessed instrument of diffusing the knowledge of him through the whole world. (Of all the Evangelists, not one marks so fully the Messiahship of Jesus, and the accomplishment of prophecy in him, as he.) And what is his condition now? Has he not far better treasures than ever he possessed on earth? Know ye then, that you also may appear to suffer loss by devoting yourselves to Christ; but if you have the honour of being his servants, his friends, his heirs; if he acknowledge you as members of his own body, yea, as his spouse, who shall participate all his glory, and have the everlasting fruition of his love; you have made a good exchange. Rejoice then in your high privileges; and be thankful to Him, by whose almighty power alone you have
been

^p Heb. xi. 15, 16.

^q Heb. x. 34.

been made willing to accept them; and let your whole lives be henceforth consecrated, as Matthew's was, to his service: so shall you in your place be his witnesses to all around you; and ere long be joined to that blessed society, where every loss shall be compensated with a proportionable weight of glory.]

DCCLXV.

THE APOSTLES CHOSEN.

Luke vi. 12, 13. *And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his Disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named Apostles.*

THE short period of our Lord's Ministry on earth rendered it expedient for him to employ others as his co-adjutors in the work. Accordingly, in reference to the twelve Patriarchs, who might be considered as the fathers of the Jewish Church, he selected twelve of his Disciples, who should be his instruments for planting and establishing his Church. There were other seventy, whom at a later period he sent forth, two and two, for the purpose of preparing the minds of the people for his personal Ministry among them^a; but the Apostles were to be his stated servants after that he should have left this world and returned to his heavenly Father. The circumstances of their appointment were peculiar, and deserve our most attentive consideration. The night previous to their appointment he spent in prayer to his heavenly Father^b: which remarkable occurrence it will be proper to notice in a threefold view:

I. As an act for our benefit—

The appointment of the Apostles was a work of singular importance—

[They

^a Luke x. 1.

^b If we suppose *προσευχῇ* to mean "in a place of prayer," we still can have no doubt what his occupation there was.

[They were to be employed in the Church as his messengers to declare his truth—his witnesses to attest it—as patterns also to illustrate—and martyrs to confirm it. But whence could a number of poor fishermen attain “a sufficiency for these things?” — — —]

Hence our blessed Lord continued the whole night in prayer for them—

[His heavenly Father was able to furnish them for this great work, and to give them success in it; and therefore our Lord importunately sought for them the grace which they stood in need of: nor would he cease from his exertions, till he had obtained all that their necessities required. The benefit of his prayer was fully manifested as soon as they were endued with power from on high: then nothing could withstand their wisdom, or subdue their courage: they were deaf to menaces, and regardless of death. Their success was rapid, extensive, permanent: and we at this day enjoy the fruits of their labours. Through that prayer the Apostles were richly furnished unto every good work; and were enabled so to establish the kingdom of our Lord, that neither earth nor hell have ever been able to prevail against it.]

II. As a lesson for our instruction—

The ordination of Ministers is also a most important work—

[On them, under God, depends the everlasting welfare of thousands. We need only compare the state of those congregations where the Gospel is faithfully preached with those which are under the superintendence of careless Ministers: in the one will be found little but ignorance and irreligion; in the other, there will be many whose minds are enlightened with Divine truth, and whose souls are quickened to a new and heavenly life.

But where shall persons be found duly qualified for the work—where those who will be willing to undertake it? True; if the Ministry of the Word be made a source of temporal emolument, there will be multitudes ready to engage in it: but if the “signs of a Minister,” or accompaniments of the Ministry, be like those in the Apostle’s days, “reproaches, necessities, and distresses for Christ’s sake;” and the only *pluralities* be “labours, stripes, prisons, deaths;” there will not be many candidates for the office, nor will the qualifications for it be thought so common as they are at present. How few are ready to go and preach to the Heathen, where the labour and self-denial are great, and the

‘ 2 Cor. xii. 10, 12.

‘ 2 Cor. xi. 23. ib. 24—28.

the earthly recompence is small! Large benefices, where little is to be done, or the work can be done by proxy, are caught up with avidity: but if nothing but a future reward be held forth, and God say, "Who will go for us?" there are few indeed that will answer with the Prophet, "Here am I, send me^e."]

This, therefore, should be the subject of our devoutest prayers—

[God himself has commanded us to commit the matter to him in prayer: "The harvest truly is plenteous, and the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth (*thrust out*^f) labourers into his harvest." And truly, all ranks and orders of men are concerned to "labour earnestly in prayer" concerning it.

How fervently should *they* pray, to whom the office of ordaining others is committed! for "if they lay hands suddenly on any man, they make themselves partakers of other men's sins^g." Nor should *they* be less earnest *who are to be ordained*. When we consider how arduous their work is, and how great their responsibility before God; when we reflect that their word will be "a savour of life to the life and salvation of many, or a savour of death to their death" and condemnation^h; and that the blood of all that perish through their neglect will be required at their hands; methinks it is a wonder that any one can be found, who, for the sake of filthy lucre, will dare to undertake it. Were the weight of the office duly considered, no one would presume to enter upon it without much prayer to God to qualify him for the discharge of it, and to bless his labours to the edification of the people.

But *the people themselves also* are no less concerned to pray, that God would "send them pastors after his own heart;" for the welfare of their souls essentially depends on the kind of ministry which they attend: if Christ be not exhibited to them in his person and offices; if they be not encouraged to receive out of his fulness all the blessings of salvation; if they be not led into discoveries of the evil of their own hearts, and instructed in the nature of that change which the Holy Spirit will effect within them; if, in short, they have not "the whole counsel of God set before them," they will be left to rest in very low attainments, if not to "perish utterly through lack of knowledge."

This lesson then should be learned by all; and so learned, as to be reduced to practice.]

III. As

^e Isai. vi. 8.

^g 1 Tim. v. 22.

^f ἐκβάλειν, Matt. ix. 37, 38.

^h 2 Cor. ii. 16.

III. As a pattern for our imitation—

Prayer is both the duty and the privilege of all—

[Our blessed Lord had doubtless more intimate communion with his Father than we can possibly have; yet are we also authorized to call God “our Father;” yea, we are commanded to do it, and to “open our mouths wide, that he may fill them.” It is not, indeed, required of us that we should spend whole nights in prayer to God; for that would probably, unless in some very peculiar circumstances, render us unfit for prosecuting the duties of the ensuing day: but we are required to “continue in prayer, and to watch thereunto with thanksgiving¹,” and the more nearly we can approach to the example of our blessed Lord in the frequency and urgency of our prayers^k, the more remarkable will be the answers that we shall receive, and the more abundant the communications of God to our souls. If we wrestled more like Jacob, we should certainly prevail to a much greater extent than in general we do^l.]

We should therefore resort to it on every particular emergency—

[Though the particular object of our Lord’s continuance in prayer does not occur to us, yet we all have some occasions that call for more than ordinary direction and assistance from God. On these occasions, whatever they may be, whether they relate to the body or the soul, to time or to eternity, we should go and spread our wants before God. His own command to us is, “In *every* thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” “In *all* our ways we must acknowledge him, and he will direct our paths.”]

In this then must all of us resemble the Lord Jesus Christ. In this has “he set us an example, that we should follow his steps:” and “we must walk as he walked.” By this must all his followers be distinguished; for they are “a people near unto him.” They are hypocrites of whom it is said, “They will not always call upon God:” all true Christians can say, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”]

APPLICATION:

[Learn hence the real state of your souls before God. Prayer has often been called the pulse of the soul: and truly it is so; for by that you may discern the state of the soul, incomparably better than you can by the pulse the state of the body. If you are prayerless people, you are dead,
altogether

¹ Col. iv. 2. ^k Ps. xxii. 2. Heb. v. 7. ^l Gen. xxxii. 34—36.

altogether dead in trespasses and sins. If your prayers are habitually cold and formal, they are such as God will never accept. No prayer will enter into the ears of the Lord of Hosts, but that which is offered "in spirit and in truth." Let us then beg of God to give us a spirit of grace and of supplication; and let us interest ourselves with God for the welfare of his Church. Let us especially remember "those who are over us in the Lord," and "labour always fervently for them in prayer," that they may be enabled to fulfil their Ministry with diligence and success. Thus shall we both insure blessings to our own souls, and be instrumental to the hastening on of that day, when "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest," and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

DCCLXVI.

AGAINST MISTAKING OUR OWN SPIRIT.

Luke ix. 55. *Ye know not what spirit ye are of.*

WHEN we consider what attainments men have made in science and philosophy; when we see them marshalling the stars, measuring their distances, tracing their courses, and ascertaining their influence, we are amazed at the strength of human intellect. But when we turn our eyes to their spiritual attainments, and inquire into their knowledge of their own hearts, we are altogether as much astonished at the extreme ignorance which they betray. Even godly persons have but very limited and partial views of their own principles of action. The very Apostles, who had long enjoyed the instructions of Christ himself, shewed on many occasions an unbecoming spirit, while they supposed themselves actuated by the best motives. One instance in particular we have before us, where, under a cloke of zeal for their Master's honour, they would have called down fire from heaven upon a whole village. Our Lord, however, rebuked them in the words we have now read; from whence we shall inquire,

I, Whence

I. Whence is it that men are so liable to self-deception?

It is manifest, beyond a doubt, that many know not what spirit they are of—

[The various classes of *ungodly* men are universally labouring under self-deception. However they neglect every duty, or violate every commandment, they persuade themselves that, on the whole, they have good hearts; nor have they the smallest conception that they are “haters of God^a.” Even the proud persecutor, so far from accounting himself an enemy to God, will imagine that he is doing God service, while he is opposing to the utmost the Redeemer’s kingdom^b. Nor are the *godly* themselves exempt from similar delusions, though they are influenced by them in a less degree. The zealous are sometimes inflamed with an unhallowed fire^c; and the timid induced to temporize^d. The confident will resolve, when they should rather pray for strength^e; and the faithless will harbour fears, when they should rather be enjoying their security^f.]

This propensity to self-deception is not hard to be accounted for—

1. There is a close affinity between good and evil—

[Good and evil are in their own nature as opposite as light and darkness: but, through the imperfection of our knowledge, they appear very nearly allied. Indifference assumes the garb of candour: worldliness is dignified by the name of honest industry: the fear of man puts on the mask of prudence: a vindictive spirit passes for a nice sense of honour. There is scarcely any other disposition, however sinful, which does not assume the name of some corresponding virtue, and thus conceal at least its own malignity, or perhaps obtrude itself upon the world as amiable and praise-worthy. Hence there arises a great difficulty in distinguishing between the good and the evil that there is in our own actions, since the very same thing may be either good or evil, according to the principles from whence it proceeds, and to the time, manner, or degree in which it is carried into execution.]

2. There

^a Rom. i. 30. & viii. 7. Col. i. 21.

^b John xvi. 2. Acts xxvi. 9.

^c v. 54. And many, actuated by vanity, too much resemble Jehu: 2 Kin. x. 16.

^d Gal. ii. 12.

^e Mat. xxvi. 35.

^f Mat. viii. 26.

2. There is a backwardness in man to search, out the evil that is in him—

[There is in every man a self-love, which renders him averse to view his own actions in an unfavourable light; and a partiality that leads him to put the best construction upon them. If there be reason to doubt the purity of our own intentions, we do not like to bring matters to the test, and to weigh our actions in the balance of the sanctuary. If a friend attempt to undeceive us, we shrink from the probe, and would gladly avoid the painful scrutiny. Were we told that there was some hidden fire likely to consume our house, we should search into every corner, and thankfully accept every assistance to discover it, in order that it might be extinguished before it had gained too great an ascendancy. But if a friend would point out the evil of our hearts, we are glad to conceal it from his view, and to harbour, rather than detect, the lurking foe. Even in the public Ministry of the Word, we are apt to think how suitable such and such admonitions are for others, instead of applying them to ourselves: and hence we continue in an evil way, persuading ourselves that we are influenced by a good spirit, while our most discerning friends lament the delusions which they cannot hinder.]

It will be of no small benefit to us to consider seriously,

II. How we may counteract its baneful influence—

Doubtless, it is easier to prescribe means to others than to use them ourselves. But, as God works by means, we would suggest such as may prove most effectual—

1. Let every grace receive a due portion of our attention—

[Many in their concern for one grace will trample upon another: in the exercise of zeal they will forget charity; and, in maintaining confidence, will overlook humility and fear. The ungodly indeed are necessitated often to thwart one propensity, while they indulge another; but all the graces of Christianity may be exercised together, and in their highest perfection: every one tempers and limits that which appears opposite to it; and all, like the rays of the sun, must be combined, to produce their full effect.]

2. Let

* To gratify their lusts, they must expose their character and dissipate their fortune; or if the love of reputation or of money preponderate, they must impose a restraint on their appetites.

2. Let every part of Scripture be regarded with equal reverence—

[It is astonishing how irreverently even good persons will sometimes treat those portions of Scripture which militate against their sentiments or practice. The plainest declarations of God are considered as “hard sayings,” and are slighted, either as impracticable in themselves, or as inapplicable to their case. But we must be careful to receive every word of God; and to improve it as “a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths:” for it is only “by taking heed to it” that we can ever effectually “cleanse our way^b.”]

3. Let Christ be set before us as our pattern and example—

[Wherever we can trace the steps of our blessed Lord, there we are to followⁱ. There were indeed some things in him which would not become us, because we are not called to the high office which he sustained. But the spirit of his actions should be copied by us, even where the actions themselves would not be proper for our imitation. We should not attempt to fast forty days and forty nights; but we should exercise self-denial. Nor should we speak of rulers in reproachful terms^k; but we should be bold and faithful in the discharge of our duty. In doubtful circumstances it will be profitable to consider what he would have done if he had been precisely in our situation. By thus divesting ourselves of partiality, and proposing to ourselves his perfect pattern, we shall have our judgment assisted, and our conduct rectified.]

4. Let us lean to the side that mortifies, rather than to that which suits, our natural inclination—

[In the present corrupt state of human nature, we shall rarely, if ever, find our natural desires drawing with precision our line of duty. *Self* has too strong a bias, even where its tendencies most accord with the word of God: nor does it ever fail to operate in some measure. If therefore we lean to that side, we may be hurried, before we are aware, to great extremes, without any prospect of recovery. But if we lean rather to the opposite side, we are in no danger of being transported *much* too far; and we have a bias uniformly operating to bring us back to the line of moderation. This rule is founded on the supposition that our natural inclinations may, in some instances, prescribe what is right. But, in cases where the line of duty is at all

doubtful,

^b Ps. cxix. 9.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^k Luke xiii. 32. Acts xxiii. 5.

doubtful, it will invariably be found safer at least, and in all human probability the *only* right way, to oppose and mortify self.]

5. Let us keep our minds open to conviction—

[If we will at all events conclude ourselves right, there is no hope of our being ever undeceived. We must be willing to suspect ourselves, and to listen to the counsel of our friends. Even Peter needed correction from his brother Paul¹; and the duty of “teaching and admonishing one another^m,” necessarily implies a readiness to receive, as well as to impart, fraternal admonition. And if we cultivate this disposition, we shall often be preserved from evils into which we might have rushed, and have reason to adore our God for the advice we have receivedⁿ.]

6. Let us pray constantly to God to search and try us—

[Our treacherous hearts can put such glosses on our conduct as to deceive both ourselves and others: but they cannot deceive God. “He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins:” he “weigheth the spirits;” and discerns with infallible certainty the smallest mixtures of evil, and the minutest deviations from his holy law. And as he beholds, so he can discover to us, the secret workings of our own corruptions. If he shine into our hearts, we shall be astonished to see the delusions which we have held fast perhaps for many years, and of which our dearest friends could never convince us! Let us then pray to him to search and try the very ground of our hearts^o; and he will not only make our senses more acute to discern good and evil^p, but will keep our feet in the way of his commandments^q.]

¹ Gal. ii. 11.

^m Col. iii. 16.

ⁿ 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

^o Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^p Heb. v. 14.

^q 1 Sam. ii. 9.

DCCLXVII.

THE DANGER OF REJECTING THE GOSPEL.

Luke x. 10—16. *Into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city which cleaveth unto us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin!*

Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.

NOTWITHSTANDING all the care which our Lord took to prepare the minds of men for the reception of his Gospel, his success was very small, insomuch that after his resurrection and ascension to heaven, his Disciples amounted to no more than five hundred. He foresaw it would be so; and when sending forth his Seventy Disciples into all the places whither he himself was about to come, he guarded them against the offence which the contracted influence of his word might occasion. He directed them how to act towards any city which should not receive them: they should express towards its inhabitants the indignation of God, and should make known to them both their iniquity and their folly. In confirmation of what he instructed them to do, he himself denounced his judgments against the cities that had rejected *him*; and then proceeded to give a general admonition to all to whom his Gospel should come.

Were we addressing Ministers, we should consider the subject more immediately in relation to *them*: but in an address intended only for private Christians, it will be more profitable to wave what relates to the conduct of the Ministry, and to suggest rather such reflections as are applicable to mankind at large, especially that part of them which is disobedient to the Gospel of Christ.

I. How awful is their obduracy!

[Our Lord complained that the cities to which he had ministered had resisted such means as, if used for the awakening of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, or even
of

of Sodom and Gomorrah, would have been effectual to bring them to repentance: "they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes." Now, without stopping to inquire why God withheld from Sodom the means of grace which would have been effectual, and vouchsafed them to Jewish cities, where he knew they would not be effectual, (a question which no human wisdom can solve,) we would call your attention to this fact as illustrated in the present day.

We acknowledge that the hearers of our Lord had many and great advantages which we have not: but on the other hand, we have great advantages which they had not. We admit, that they were instructed by One who "spake as never man spake;" and that they saw the mighty works which he wrought in confirmation of his word: but on the other hand, the meanness of his appearance and of his followers was a stumbling-block, which it was exceeding difficult to get over, and which is entirely removed out of our way. Besides, they saw the plan of Christianity only in a very obscure and partial light; whereas we see it in all its fulness and completion: and the evidence we have from that great miracle of all, his resurrection from the dead, is stronger than all those which they beheld. We may, therefore, justly say that our advantages are greater than theirs: and yet multitudes hear the Gospel now, and are unmoved by it: some sneer at it as folly and enthusiasm; and others rest in a mere formal profession of it, without any experience of its transforming power. What then shall we say of them? Are not they blind and hardened in a very awful degree? Are not they also more obdurate than the idolatrous Syrians, or the filthy Sodomites? Yes: far less evidence, and an obscurer statement of the Gospel, would have brought *them* to "repent in dust and ashes;" whereas the unbelievers of the present day are proof against an accumulated weight of evidence, and against the full splendor of evangelic truth.

Let this then be considered by us: and when we wonder at the blindness and obduracy of the Jews, let us remember how blind we ourselves have been, and how unaffected by the most stupendous miracles of love and mercy that ever were vouchsafed to men.]

II. How heinous their guilt!

[Unbelief is in general scarcely ever thought of as a sin: the open infidel justifies himself by a pretended want of evidence; and those who maintain a form of religion fancy themselves possessed of saving faith: so that, whatever
men

men have to condemn in their own conduct, they never think of bemoaning their *unbelief*. But behold what was Christ's judgment respecting this! He considered unbelief as a more heinous sin than any which Tyre and Sidon, or even Sodom and Gomorrha, had committed, and as involving his hearers in a deeper condemnation than any to which the vilest of those cities would be doomed. He also commanded his Disciples to "wipe off the dust from their feet against those who received them not," in token of God's indignation against them, and his abandoning of them to the evil of their own ways^a. Nor can we wonder at it, when Christ and his Father identify themselves with all the Ministers of the Gospel: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." What a view does this representation give us of unbelief! And how little idea have the unbelieving world of the light in which they are regarded by a holy God! But when once the Holy Ghost is sent into their hearts to convince them of sin, they become convinced of this sin in particular; and view it in its proper colours, as a mixture of ignorance, impiety, and rebellion.

Let the towering imaginations of the formalist then fall to the ground: let the most decent amongst us see what guilt he has contracted: and let every one acknowledge that God is just in consigning over to perdition those who, either in theory or in practice, reject Christ, and thus eventually "make God himself a liar."]

III. How great their folly!

[The Seventy Disciples were especially commanded to testify to those who rejected them, that the contempt which they manifested for their message did not at all invalidate the truth or importance of it: "Notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come unto you." Thus must we say to those who disregard the Gospel: "Your unbelief cannot make the faith of God of none effect." If your neglect of the Gospel could set aside its authority, so that you should stand excused for your disobedience to it, your folly would not be so great: but you cannot alter one single word in it: Christ will still be the only Saviour of the world, though you should pour ever so much contempt upon him: and faith in his name will be the only means of obtaining an interest in him, though you should dispute ever so much against it: and that declaration, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not

^a Acts xiii. 51.

not shall be damned," will be carried into execution, however you may complain of its harshness and severity. The ridicule and contempt poured on Noah whilst building the ark, did not at all affect the truth of his warnings: the flood came precisely as he had foretold, and swept away all the inhabitants of the earth. And so will it be in the day of judgment: the Gospel will prove true, and its sanctions will be executed, "whether men will hear it, or whether they forbear." What folly and madness then is it to trifle thus with the words of life! Common sense, methinks, should lead men to consider what they hear, and to search the Scriptures daily whether these things be so. If they can disprove the truth of the Gospel, well: let them then despise it if they please: but if they cannot disprove it, let them obey it; and that not in a partial and formal manner, but unreservedly, and with their whole hearts.]

IV. How pitiable their condition!

[Could we behold the present state of those who once inhabited Sodom and Gomorrha; could we see their weeping, their wailing, their gnashing of teeth, how would our bowels yearn over them! Yet, grievous as their condition is, it is more tolerable than that which is prepared for the despisers of the Gospel. This is not declared once, but often; and that, too, by HIM who will assign to all their proper doom. Say, then, whether we should not be filled with pity towards the thoughtless, deceived, and deceiving world? Suppose them enjoying all that earth can give; yet, with such prospects before them, who must not regard them as objects of the tenderest compassion? Behold a man just about to be racked upon the wheel, or to be burned in a slow consuming fire; give him what you will preparatory to his sufferings, you cannot but view him with most heartfelt grief. Thus then should we view the contemners of Christ, whether they manifest that contempt in a way of open infidelity or of secret disaffection. There will be degrees of misery, indeed, proportioned to the degrees of guilt which each has contracted; but the least miserable of those who perish under the light of the Gospel, will have a heavier doom than shall ever fall to the lot of Sodom and Gomorrha. Oh that our head were a fountain of tears to run down for them night and day; and that we might labour, all of us, whilst yet there is time, to pluck them as brands out of the burning!]

ADVICE—

1. Let all who hear the Gospel *consider their responsibility*—

[The

[The generality think little but of hearing such or such a *man*: but be it known to you, that the word you hear is “not the word of *man*, but of *God*,” and is to be so received, if it be agreeable to his revealed will. You know that an ambassador is the representative of his king, and that the reception or rejection of his message is considered as affecting, not him, but his master who sent him. So it is with the ambassadors of Christ^b — — — O that whenever we attend upon the House of God, we might attend as if Christ himself were come down to instruct us, or as if God the Father spoke to us by an audible voice from heaven!]

2. Let them *improve their privileges*—

[It is an inestimable privilege to have the Gospel faithfully administered to us. What if Sodom and Gomorrha had enjoyed that privilege? *they* would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes, and would probably “have remained to this very day.” So, if millions that are now in hell had heard what we have, they would perhaps have obeyed the truth and been saved by it. We are sure that many have made a far better improvement of it than we; and therefore we should humble ourselves on a view of our unprofitableness, and labour to bring forth fruits worthy of the culture bestowed upon us.]

^b Text, with John xiii. 20.

DCCLXVIII.

THE ENROLMENT OF OUR NAMES IN HEAVEN, A
GROUND OF JOY.

Luke x. 20. *Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

THERE is a holy jealousy which well becomes the Ministers of God: for people are ever ready to pride themselves upon any distinctions which God may confer upon them, and to rest in the attainments they have made, instead of regarding them only as means to an ulterior good. It should seem that the Seventy Disciples, who had been sent forth to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, were surprised when they found that devils and unclean
spirits

spirits were subject unto them : and on their return to their Divine Master, they could not help expressing the high gratification which this power had afforded them. Had their minds been more suitably affected, they would have rejoiced rather in the prospect which that circumstance afforded them of the final triumphs of their Lord. Jesus therefore, in a kind and tender manner, corrected their views, and pointed out to them a more just ground of self-congratulation : assuring them in the mean time that their powers should be still more enlarged, and their victory over Satan be more complete. The caution given to them is applicable to Christians in every age : their comforts and successes are doubtless a proper subject of joy and thankfulness ; but it is the final success only that can make them completely happy ; and the only solid joy is that which arises from a well-founded expectation of happiness beyond the grave.

In confirmation of this truth, we would observe,

- I. That the enrolment of our names in heaven is a fact which may be known—

The names of all God's people are, as it were, written in his book—

[The names of all the tribes of Israel were registered in a book. It was of that book that Moses spake, when he desired God to blot him out of it rather than not forgive his offending people^a. And as long as the Jewish states continued, such a book was carefully preserved^b. Such a register God himself is represented as having formed of all his chosen people. His book is called “ the book of life, of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world^c.” This book, as well as the books of God's remembrance, in which the actions of men were recorded, will be brought forth at the last day^d; and they who were written in it will be exalted to glory^e, whilst “ those who were not written in it will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death^f.”]

Our enrolment in that book is a fact which may be known—

[St.

^a Exod. xxxii. 32.

^b Isai. iv. 3.

^c Rev. xiii. 8.

^d Rev. xx. 12.

^e Rev. xxi. 27.

^f Rev. xx. 15.

[St. Paul knew it respecting many, both men and women, who had united with him in endeavours to advance the kingdom of Christ^z. And the same may be known also by those who are there enrolled. We cannot indeed go up to heaven to examine that sacred record; nor can we have it brought down to us on earth: yet may we assuredly know its contents as far as respects ourselves. There are two ways in which this may be done; first, by the testimony of the Spirit; and next, by the evidence of our lives. Respecting the witness of the Spirit, we do not say that the Spirit will bear any direct testimony to our souls, *irrespective of any thing that he has wrought in us*; (this I conceive to be a very dangerous error;) but he will shine upon his own work, and cause us to see it. *When we are regenerate*, he will, as “a Spirit of adoption, enable us to cry, Abba, Father;” and will “witness *with our spirits* that we are the Children of God, and heirs of his everlasting kingdom^b.” *When we are regenerate*, I say, he will do this, but not before; for he never did, nor can, attest a falsehood, which he would do if he were to witness to any unregenerate man that he was a Child of God. The evidence of our own lives also will enable us to ascertain this fact. There are certain “things which infallibly accompany salvationⁱ,” and which therefore warrant us to infer that we are in the number of God’s elect^k, and to assure ourselves of a final and everlasting acceptance with him^l. The former is the more delightful to our feelings; the latter is the more convincing to our judgment: but from whichever source we draw our conclusions, if only our premises be right, our conclusions are infallible. Hence St. Paul was so assured of happiness in the eternal world^m; and hence every Believer is authorized to adopt the words of the Church of old, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.”]

Having shewn that the fact of our enrolment in heaven may be known, we observe,

II. That when known, it is a ground of most exalted joy—

The expulsion of devils from the bodies of men was a just ground of joy—

[It was an evidence of God’s presence with the Disciples; (for who but God could cast them out?) it was also a strong confirmation of their word; (no stronger could be given:)]

^z Phil. iv. 3.

^b Rom. viii. 15—17.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 9, 10.

^k 1 Thess. i. 3, 4.

^l 1 John, iii. 14, 18—21.

^m 2 Cor. v. 1. 2 Tim. iv. 8.

given :) it was, moreover, an unspeakable blessing to those who were thus delivered from Satan's power; (and who must not rejoice in the communication of so great a good?) above all, it was a pledge of greater victories over Satan, and the utter destruction of his kingdom. Our Lord's prohibition, therefore, must not be understood as absolute, but only as comparative; as when he bade his followers "not to labour for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life."]

But the knowledge of our interest in the Divine favour is incomparably a greater ground of joy—

[Indeed nothing can for a moment be put in competition with this: this is infinitely beyond every other ground of joy.

It is *the most sublime*. What is the possession of thrones and kingdoms in comparison of this? All earthly things are lighter than vanity itself when weighed against the glories of the heavenly worldⁿ.

It is *the most pure*. Every earthly joy has a tendency to corrupt the mind; to fill us with pride; to foster every evil disposition; to rivet us to the world; and to retard our progress toward the kingdom of heaven. But who was ever corrupted by a view of his interest in the Saviour? We do not ask, When did a corrupt man pretend to an interest in Christ, or boast that he was of the number of God's elect? for that, alas! may be found in every place and every age; but we confidently ask, Whom did the knowledge of his interest in Christ ever corrupt in any respect whatever? Ignorant people imagine that a view of our election of God will puff us up with pride, or render us indifferent to the attainment of holiness; but every Child of God is the more humbled by a conviction that God is pacified towards him^o, and is the more determinately bent to fulfil the whole will of God. Of this we are assured on the authority of an inspired Apostle, on whose testimony we may rely with most implicit confidence^p.

It is *the most substantial*. Whatever other sources of joy we may have, they may all fail and disappoint us. Ask those who have attained the principal objects of their desire, whether they have found all the satisfaction in them that they once expected? and they will all be constrained to acknowledge, that vanity and vexation of spirit is the sum of all created good. In a little time our sweetest enjoyments cloy, and cease to afford us any material gratification: in

a season

ⁿ See the description of the Christian's state, Heb. xii. 22—24.

^o Ezek. xvi. 63.

^p 1 John iii. 3.

a season of deep affliction they lose all their power, and are not unfrequently turned into sources of the greatest sorrow. But whom did the pardoning love of Christ ever fail to comfort? Who ever ceased to derive consolation from it under the heaviest afflictions? Who ever found it a source or an occasion of sorrow to his soul, except indeed that he sorrowed because he did not value it more, and improve it better? Other joys embitter the thought of death, and vanish the moment that the soul takes its flight from the body: but the knowledge of our acceptance with God makes the thought of death delightful; and the joy arising from it is perfected in the very instant of our departure hence. Lastly,

It is *that, without which no other ground of joy can exist.* We will suppose that you possess health, and riches, and wisdom, and honour, and every gratification that your heart can wish, and that too in the highest degree that it can be enjoyed; what is it all, whilst you have no prospect beyond the grave? If you were sensible of your state, you would be like a person sitting down to a banquet, with a sword suspended over his head by a single hair; you would not know one moment's peace. Who would envy a man, that after a few hours was to be burnt alive? Whatever he might possess, he would be regarded by all as a pitiable object: and such is that man who, after a few more days, must be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone: whatever of wealth or honour he may have attained, he is a wretched creature, and if he be at all sensible of his state, he would gladly exchange conditions with the meanest and most afflicted saint on earth.]

What comparison then will earthly joys bear with this? Even that of casting out devils, and finding them subject to one's power, would be nothing, when it is considered that the person so honoured may soon be cast out himself, and bidden to "depart accursed into everlasting fire."¹]

LEARN then,

1. To seek this great blessing above all things—

[Some may be ready to say, "If God has not, of his own sovereign grace, inscribed my name in his book from all eternity, how shall I get it done now?" To this I answer, The secret decrees of God are no ground of action to you: you are to act precisely as if all depended on your own personal exertion: nay, more, God encourages you so to act, with an assurance that you shall not exert yourself in vain. Go to the Lord Jesus Christ, and cast yourselves at
the

the foot of his cross, and then see whether it shall be in vain. He has said, that "Whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out;" and you may rest assured that that promise shall be fulfilled to you. However distant you have been from God, you shall be "brought nigh to him by the blood of the cross;" and "from being strangers and foreigners, you shall become fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God^r." This blessing it is your duty to seek in God's appointed way; and if it be, as we have shewn, incomparably the greatest that a human Being can possess, seek it with an earnestness proportioned to its worth — — —]

2. Never to grow weary in the pursuit of it—

[Many persons are fond of puzzling themselves with the deeper doctrines of religion, when they should rather be edifying themselves with those which are more plain. Some will argue, that if God have written our names in his book, he will never blot them out again, because "his gifts and calling are without repentance." But though it is true that "God will carry on his work," and "perfect that which concerneth us," it is equally true, that "if we draw back, we draw back into perdition, and God's soul will have no pleasure in us^s." Of his faithful people he has said, that "he will not blot out their names from the book of life^t:" but he uses directly opposite language in reference to the ungodly, and to those who decline from his ways^u. It is "to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality, that God will give eternal life^v." Let no difficulties then discourage you; but "press forward for the prize of your high calling;" and expect assuredly, that, as already "your witness is in heaven, and your record is on high^w," so your unworthy names shall in due time be acknowledged by your Lord and Saviour, and you shall "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."]

^r This is the idea suggested in the text. The enrolling of names has respect to citizens, whose rights are thereby ascertained and assured.

^s Heb. x. 38, 39.

^t Rev. iii. 5.

^u Exod. xxxii. 33. Ps. lxix. 28. Jer. xvii. 13.

^v Rom. ii. 6, 7.

^w Job xvi. 19.

DCCLXIX.

THE GOSPEL REVEALED TO BABES.

Luke x. 21. *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

DEEP and mysterious are the ways of God, and “as far above our thoughts and ways, as the heavens are above the earth.” But the more they are contemplated, the more will they approve themselves to us; even where they are most inscrutable, and where the heart of the natural man would be most ready to rise against them, a humble and pious mind will find abundant cause both for submission and joy. Of our blessed Lord we are often told, that he groaned in spirit: for indeed he was altogether “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” as his daily and hourly companion: but on one occasion it is said, that “he rejoiced in spirit:” and it was in an hour when he had been particularly contemplating the dispensations of his Father in relation to his Gospel. To the proud indeed this would be a subject of complaint and murmuring; but to the humble it was a proper ground of gratitude and thanksgiving. This is evident from the words before us; for the fuller understanding of which I will shew,

I. The conduct of God in relation to his Gospel—

Two things are here specified:

1. “He has hid it from the wise and prudent”—

[By “the wise and prudent” we are not to understand those that are *truly* wise and *truly* prudent, but those who are “wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight,” who are just objects of God’s heavy displeasure^a.

From these “God has hid” his Gospel. Not but that they have the same access to it as others, and might attain to the knowledge of it as well as others, if only they would
seek

^a Isai v. 21. with Rom. xii. 16.

seek it in a becoming spirit: for God does nothing either to withhold it from them, or to incapacitate them for the perception of it. God is said to do what he permits to be done^b: and it is not by any active exertion of his which man cannot withstand, but by such means only as leave men altogether responsible for their own blindness, that he hides his truth from the minds of any.

The Gospel is hid from this description of persons, partly, *through the very constitution of the Gospel itself*: for it reveals such a way of salvation as a proud conceited mind cannot receive: "it is foolishness to the natural man; neither can he receive it, because it is spiritually discerned^c." The doctrine of the cross is to the Jews a "stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness^d." It was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, that the same person who should "be for a sanctuary to his believing people, should be for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, many amongst whom should stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken^e." And to the same effect was it said of Jesus, by the holy man who took him in his arms, that "he was set for the fall, as well as for the rising, of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed^f."

It is yet further hid from them *through the agency of Satan*, to whom the blindness of unbelievers is especially ascribed, and who labours incessantly to prevent "the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, from shining unto them^g."

Doubtless it is also still further hid from them through their being given up by God to judicial blindness. "God's spirit will not always strive with man^h." After having been long resisted, he will cease to "work upon their mindsⁱ:" they will then be given up to believe their own delusions^k, to be taken in their own craftiness; and all "their wisdom and prudence will be brought to nought^l." In this way vast multitudes have been blinded in former ages^m, and are blinded at this very hour.]

2. But "it is revealed unto babes"—

[The term, "babes," includes not only those who are weak

^b Comp. 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. with 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^d 1 Cor. i. 23.

^e Isai. viii. 14, 15.

^f Luke ii. 34, 35.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^h Gen. vi. 3.

ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 19.

^k 2 Thess. ii. 11.

^l 1 Cor. i. 19, and iii. 19.

^m Rom. ix. 7, 8.

weak in respect of intellectual attainments, but those also, who, though of vigorous and cultivated minds, are sensible of their inability to discern spiritual truths without having first a spiritual discernment imparted to them.

To these the Gospel is revealed; and they have such a perception of it as brings peace into their souls, and holiness into their hearts and lives. Of course, we must not suppose that the mere circumstance of any person's being weak in understanding will procure for him this blessing: but if he seek this blessing in God's appointed way, the circumstance of his being of weak understanding shall not preclude him from the benefit. And in this respect persons of this description have an advantage, which is, that they are more easily convinced of their need of Divine teaching than persons of learning and refinement are; and are thereby more easily induced to seek of God the teaching of his good Spirit: and hence it is that many of *them* attain Divine knowledge, whilst from the great mass of others it is hid.

That this preference is shewn to them is evident, both from the records of God's word and from daily observation. Whom did our blessed Saviour choose for his Apostles? Not the learned of the Scribes and Pharisees, but a few poor fishermen. To the proud he spoke in parables; which afterwards to his child-like Disciples he explained; saying to them, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to others in parables; that seeing, they might not see, and hearing, they might not understandⁿ:" and hence of the Rulers and of the Pharisees it is asked, "Have any of *them* believed in him^o?" In like manner the Apostles themselves found little success among the great and learned: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called: but God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the mighty, yea, and things base and despised to bring to nought those which were high in worldly estimation, that no flesh might glory in his presence^p." And is it not so at this day? Who are the people that experience the enlightening, comforting, and transforming efficacy of the Gospel now? Are they the rich, and the great, and the learned? Would to God they were! But it is not so: it is to "babes, and not to the wise and prudent, that the Gospel is revealed" at this hour, as well as in former days: the Gospel has still the same stamp and character upon it as ever, in that "it is preached chiefly,

ⁿ Luke viii. 10.

^o John vii. 48.

^p 1 Cor. i. 27—29.

chiefly, if not exclusively, to the poor³," and that "the common people hear it gladly¹."]

That the Divine conduct in this respect may not be an offence unto us, let us consider,

II. The dispositions with which it should be contemplated by us—

We should be duly sensible that this is indeed the conduct of God in relation to his Gospel: and we should evince,

1. Our submission to it, as an act of sovereignty—

[Certainly in this matter God acts as a sovereign, who has a right to dispense his blessings to whomsoever he will: "it is even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in thy sight." God might have revealed his Gospel to all, or hid it from all, if it had pleased him; and none would have had any right to complain. As well might the fallen angels complain that man alone had a Redeemer provided for him, as any Child of man complain, that he has derived less advantage from the Gospel than another. Had any other of Paul's hearers reason to complain, because "the Lord opened Lydia's heart to attend to the things that were spoken by him?" Assuredly not: God's grace is his own; and he may dispense it as he pleases, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure². He himself asks, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" and if *we* claim such a right, much more may *He*, who is, as Jesus calls him, "Lord of heaven and earth," and who consequently may dispose both of heaven and earth according to his will, and "without giving to us an account of any of his matters¹." When therefore we behold this, shall we presume to strive with God, or to say unto him, What doest thou? Shall the clay arraign the conduct of the potter, or "the vessel say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" "He that reproveth God, let him answer it²."

Many, who see that God does indeed dispense his blessings according to his own good pleasure, and the inscrutable counsel of his own will, endeavour to get rid of the notion of his sovereignty by asserting, that God has respect to some goodness in man which he has foreseen; and that he regulates his dispensations in accordance with some worthiness

¹ Matt. xi. 5.

² Job xxxiii. 13.

¹ Mark xii. 37.

² Rom. ix. 20, 21.

¹ Eph. i. 5. Phil. ii. 13.

² Job. xl. 2.

thiness which he knows will at a future period appear in the objects of his choice, bestowing his favours on those who he knows will make a good use of them, and withholding them from those only who he foresees would abuse them. But, if this be so, how shall we understand those declarations of our Lord both in the preceding and following context? He turned him, we are told, to his Disciples, and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them^r." In this place the sovereign grace of God in the disposal of his gifts is clearly asserted. But you may say, True; God gave to some what he withheld from others: but he gave to those who he knew would duly improve his gifts: and the persons from whom he withheld them, were involved in no responsibility on account of them. In order to prove the doctrine which has been insisted on, you must shew me, that God has bestowed the means of salvation on those who would *not* improve them, and withheld them from those who *would* have improved them: shew me *this*, and I grant that the point is established beyond a doubt. Look then at what our Lord asserts in the context respecting Tyre and Sidon, and Bethsaida and Chorazin. To these latter were means of conviction afforded, which were withheld from the former. Were these latter better than the former? Quite the reverse: had our Saviour's miracles been wrought in Tyre and Sidon, *they* would long ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes: but when done in Capernaum, they had no other effect than thrusting her down the deeper into hell^z. Now all this must have been foreknown to God, else Jesus could not so positively have asserted it: yet here is evidence, that God withheld from some the very means which they would have duly improved, and imparted to others those very same means which he knew they would abuse to their own more aggravated condemnation. What shall we say then to these things? God himself tells us what to say: "Be still, and know that I am God^a," who "have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and have compassion on whom I will have compassion^b."]

2. Our gratitude for it as an act of mercy—

[Suppose that the Gospel were to be understood only as the deeper sciences are, by men of erudition and learning,
in

^r ver. 23, 24.

^a Ps. xlv. 10.

^z ver. 13—15.

^b Rom. ix. 15, 18.

in what a deplorable condition would the poor be! *They* have no time for laborious investigations, nor any of the endowments necessary for philosophical researches. *They* therefore could have no hope of ever attaining the knowledge of salvation. From absolute necessity *their* days must be consumed in making provision for the body: and unless they were so occupied, the whole world must be in a state of stagnation and want. But God has shewn no such partiality for the rich as to confine the knowledge of his Gospel to them. Earthly comforts indeed he has given in richer abundance to them; but spiritual blessings he has rather reserved for the poor: as St. James hath said, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" Thus, where most there seems to have been an inequality in his dispensations, he has shewn an impartiality, making up to the one in spiritual blessings what he has withheld in temporal; and giving advantages in reference to eternity to those who have the less favourable lot in respect of the things of time and sense.

And is not this a ground, a just ground, of joy? Who, that sees what privations are often experienced by the poor, must not rejoice to be informed, that, taking both worlds into the account, there is a preponderance in their favour? Our blessed Lord rejoiced in this; yea, and leaped for joy^d: and we also, if our minds be constituted like his, shall from our inmost souls contemplate it with gratitude and thanksgiving.]

Let us LEARN then,

1. Rightly to appreciate Divine knowledge—

[We would on no account utter a word that should detract from the excellence of human knowledge. We readily allow that learning does elevate and expand the mind, so as to raise its possessor far above his fellows in many respects; but when compared with spiritual knowledge, it is a poor, and low, and grovelling attainment. St. Paul was excelled by none of his contemporaries in mental attainments: yet, valuable as he once esteemed them, he, when truly converted to God, said, "What things were gain to me, those I count but loss for Christ: yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." And such must be your estimate also of this knowledge; for it is this only that will render us truly happy, either in this world or in that which is to come — — —]

2. To

^c Jam. i. 5.

^d ἡγαλλιάσατο,

^e Phil. iii. 7, 8.

2. To seek it in God's appointed way—

[Human sciences are to be attained by study; but the knowledge of the Gospel must be gained by prayer. In the words immediately following my text, our Lord says, "No man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; or who the Father is, but the Son, and *he to whom the Son shall reveal him.*" Know ye then that, though the study of the Holy Scriptures is necessary, it is not sufficient: for in the same place where you are told to "seek for wisdom as for hid treasures," you are told to "lift up your voice, and to cry unto God for it; for that it is God alone who gives it^f." Meditation and prayer must go hand in hand: and if you will seek for knowledge in this way, though you be but a babe, you shall attain it; and, though you be a mere "fool in all other respects, you shall not err therein^g."———]

^f Prov. ii. 1—6.

^g Isai. xxxv. 8.

DCCLXX.

MARTHA AND MARY'S CHARACTERS COMPARED.

Luke x. 41, 42. *Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

IT is a generally prevailing notion, that religion should be confined to the Church and the closet, and not be brought forward as a topic of conversation in company. But our Lord's conduct completely refutes this absurd idea; and shews that we ought to improve our intercourse with men, by causing our light to shine before them, and by endeavouring to instil the knowledge of religion into their minds. If it be objected, "that his office was peculiar, and that therefore we ought not to imitate him in this respect," behold, the history before us introduces us to him in the house of a friend, where he had occasion to determine this very point in reference to the women whom he was visiting: one of them was applauded by him for embracing the opportunity afforded her to obtain religious

Q Q

instruction;

VOL. VII.

instruction; and the other was reprov'd for a neglect of it; and that too at a time when such neglect would have been as excusable as it could be under any circumstances whatever.

To elucidate this subject, we shall,

I. Compare the characters of Martha and Mary—

We may first notice *wherein they were agreed*—

[We are assured that both of them were Disciples of our Lord. We could not, indeed, ascertain this from the circumstance of his visit to them; (for he sometimes associated with proud Pharisees, and notorious sinners;) but we know it from the strong and mutual affection that subsisted between them. We presume, therefore, that both of them believed in him as the Messiah: both of them looked to him as the fountain and foundation of all their hopes: both of them confessed his name, and were willing to bear his cross: and lastly, both of them desired to make his will the rule of their conduct.]

We may next consider *wherein they differed*—

[There are very different degrees of piety, where the same opportunities and advantages are enjoyed: and the very same persons are in different frames at different seasons. The very best of men, if considered in the light in which some particular action would place him, would appear very unlike a true Christian. Though, therefore, we must not apologize for sin, we must make allowance for the operation of peculiar circumstances, when we are weighing the general characters of men.]

Martha then, we observe, was *unseasonably* anxious about the affairs of this life, while her sister Mary treated them with becoming indifference. The great Teacher and Saviour of mankind had condescended to take up his abode with them: it might be expected, therefore, that they would lose as little as possible of his company, and devolve on others their domestic employments, rather than deprive themselves of his valuable instructions. And thus it was with Mary. She was so absorbed in her attention to his discourses, that she neglected secular matters as of inferior concern. But Martha, on the contrary, was so intent on providing for her guest, that she was quite forgetful of her spiritual interests. We do not mean to justify a neglect of domestic duties; but we contend that there may be occasions so urgent as to demand our immediate attention, even though some points of less importance should be neglected.

lected. No one could doubt but that a disregard of dress would be very excusable, in case our life were in danger from fire: and, in the same manner, Mary's disregard of worldly formalities might well be excused, when she was called from them by duties of paramount obligation.

Martha, moreover, was *unduly* anxious about the affairs of this life. Granting that she meant nothing but to honour her Lord, and that her way of honouring him was proper, still, why did she suffer her temper to be ruffled? Why did she reflect upon her sister, for not uniting with her in such unprofitable employments? Why did she endeavour to interest Jesus himself in her quarrels; and even find fault with him for not interposing his authority to make Mary as worldly as herself? All this betrayed a little mind, occupied with vanities, studious of show, and too susceptible of irritation from things which ought never to have gained such an ascendant over her. Mary, on the contrary, indifferent to earthly pomp, evinced the superior heavenliness of her mind, and thereby preserved the tranquillity of it undisturbed.]

We shall more accurately determine their respective characters, if we,

II. Consider the judgment of our Lord respecting them—

In this answer to Martha,

1. He lays down a general position respecting the care of the soul—

[The care of the soul, by whatever terms we describe it, is justly called “the one thing needful.” Were we indeed to judge by the conduct of the world at large, we should rather call it, ‘the one thing needless;’ since every pursuit, however trifling, is preferred before it. But there is nothing of such value as the soul: the whole world, in comparison of it, is a mere vanity. Nor is there any difference in this respect between the rich and the poor: the souls of all are of equal value in the sight of God; all are equally concerned to secure eternal happiness. There is no situation where an attention to our spiritual interests can be dispensed with; no situation wherein the concerns of eternity should not be uppermost in our minds. Other things may be desirable; but the care of the soul is *needful*, absolutely, universally, and indispensably needful.]

2. He

2. He applies that position to the present occasion—

[He first applies it *in a way of reproof*. Though he loved Martha, he would not forbear to reprove in her what he saw amiss. He tells her, that she was acting in direct opposition to this obvious and established truth; and that her distraction of mind, arising from "*many things*," argued an unmindfulness about "*one thing*," which was of more importance than all other things together. But, though he reproved her, he was far from shewing even that severity which her petulance deserved. He spoke with a tenderness well calculated to conciliate her esteem, and with an earnestness fitted to impress her mind with the importance of the subject^a.

Happy would it be for us, if when we are too deeply involved in worldly cares, we would call to mind this salutary reproof, and consider it as addressed immediately to ourselves.

Next, our Lord applies this position *in a way of approbation*. The part which Mary had chosen is called by him, "that good part." Now what was it that Mary had done? She had been sitting at the feet of Jesus, and listening with delight to his instructive conversation. She had, in short, been more occupied about the welfare of her soul than about a vain parade of courtesy and compliment. This might well be called a "*good part*:" it was good in the estimation of Jesus, and must be so in the opinion of all who judge according to truth. People indeed, when in the midst of gaiety and dissipation, ridicule it as absurd: but did ever any man that had chosen this good part find reason to condemn it? Can we conceive of any pious man on his death-bed, cautioning his surviving relatives against loving their Lord too much, and feeling too deeply the interests of their souls? It was no little commendation of the part which Mary chose, that "it should never be taken away from her:" our Lord would not deprive her of it; nor would he suffer any other, whether men or devils, to take it away. As for Martha's case, the effect of that would be as transient as the feast itself: but the fruits of Mary's attention should last for ever.

Let us only bear in mind this vindication of Mary's cause, and we can never doubt whose character we should prefer, or whose conduct we should imitate.]

ADDRESS,

^a Observe the repetition, Martha, Martha: see others of a similar nature, Luke xiii, 34. & xxii. 31.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are wholly occupied with the pursuits of this life—

[What, think you, would our Lord have said to Martha, if her state had been like yours? Would he have approved of it, and have told her that her attention to her social and relative duties was sufficient, though she took no care at all about her soul?— — —]

2. Those who, though professing to be devoted to Christ, are of a worldly spirit—

[What a poor appearance did Martha make on this occasion! and what little encouragement you have to follow her example! Remember, that “you should be crucified to the world, and the world should be crucified to you” — — —]

3. Those who are seeking with all earnestness the salvation of their souls—

[You must expect, that lukewarm and worldly professors will condemn you as much as the ungodly themselves do: and the more nearly they are related to you, the more asperity, perhaps, they may shew towards you. But commit your cause to Jesus; and he will vindicate you in due season. Positive duties, indeed, you must on no account neglect. But, while the world has your hands, let Jesus have your hearts — — —]

^b Gal. vi. 14.

DCCLXXI.

CAUTION AGAINST HYPOCRISY.

Luke xii. 1. *In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his Disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

RARELY, if ever, can we find a greater instance of fidelity than in the history before us. Our Lord had been dining with a Pharisee, and, even whilst he was at dinner, he upbraided the whole sect of Pharisees, and accused them of the vilest hypocrisy.

hypocrisy. This might have been thought by some a breach of hospitality; but a sense of his duty to God was paramount to every other consideration. The Pharisee had begun with expressing his wonder that our Lord had not washed his hands before he sat down to meat; for among the Pharisees this ceremony had been magnified into a religious observance. This superstition our Lord had not chosen to sanction: and as among the Pharisees it was accompanied with a scandalous neglect of internal purity, he exposed the folly of it, and condemned in the severest terms all who substituted such a rite in the place of vital godliness. His reproofs, as might be expected, greatly irritated his indignant hearers: yet no sooner had an immense multitude assembled at the door, than he went out to them, and, in the presence of them all, enjoined his Disciples above all things to beware of that grand feature of the Pharisaic character, hypocrisy*.

This caution, so boldly and so strongly given, deserves *our* attention, no less than that of the Disciples to whom it was spoken. We propose, therefore,

I. To consider the evil against which our Lord cautioned them—

The nature of hypocrisy is far from being generally understood. Many would suppose, that conduct which was notoriously evil, would, from its notoriety, be exempt from the charge of hypocrisy; and that there could be no hypocrisy, where the person was not conscious that he was deceiving others. But that term, according to the Scripture use of it, is very extensive; and under it may be included many different forms or degrees of hypocrisy.

1. That which is known both to ourselves and others—

[Hypocrisy

* See chap. xi. 37 to the end. *πῶλον*, in the text, seems better to be construed with *προσίχθη*.

[Hypocrisy consists in acting contrary to our professions: and this we may do in such an open and shameless way as to manifest clearly to others, no less than to ourselves, that we are dissemblers with God.

How is it with the great mass of those who *disregard religion*? Do they cast off the Christian name also? Do they not rather account themselves Christians; and would they not be highly offended if their claim to that title were disputed? Yet have they in reality as little of Christianity in their hearts and lives as the very Heathen: and there is reason to believe, that they would have lived precisely as they have, if they had all the while known Christianity to be a fable; and that they would continue to live in the very same state, if now for the first time they should learn that our religion were founded in imposture. To them we may safely apply those words of the Apostle, "They profess that they know God, but in works deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate^b."

It is precisely the same with many also who *profess a high regard for religion*. They are strenuous advocates for decorum, and are very observant of outward forms; but are as far from any thing like vital godliness as the most profane — — They may impose upon a few ignorant people, who have not an idea what religion is; but persons of the least education, who think at all for themselves, see that all those forms are a mere farce, if unaccompanied with the affections of the heart; and these formalists themselves know, and feel, and amongst each other will acknowledge them to be so. Of such persons St. Paul says, that "they have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof; that, like Jannes and Jambres, (two great opposers of Moses,) they resist the truth, being men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith; and that their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was^c."

Thus is the hypocrisy of many covered with so thin a veil, that every one of the smallest penetration may discover it: and if their professions be treated with respect, it is merely from a desire which every one feels to make the way to heaven as easy as possible, and to lower the standard of religion to his own attainments.]

2. That which, though hid from others, is known to ourselves—

[It is no uncommon thing for persons to embrace certain religious principles, without ever attending to their sanctifying

^b Tit. i. 16.

^c 2 Tim. iii. 5—9.

sanctifying efficacy. Such were Judas, and Ananias, and Sapphira: these did actually impose on others; they were considered by all as sound converts: but could Judas be ignorant that he was a thief? or Ananias and Sapphira that they were liars? So it is then with many professors of religion, who pass for real Christians at this time: their exterior appearance is that of sanctity; but one is dishonest, another is addicted to falsehood, another gives way to lewd desires and practices, another is under the dominion of his evil tempers. Now, notwithstanding the esteem in which they may be held, must not these persons, to say the least, have many secret misgivings, or rather, if they consider at all, must they not know that their hearts are not right with God? We may see the character of such persons drawn to the life by the apostle Paul: all their high professions and evil practices are exhibited in contrast with each other, and stand as a monument of the wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart ^d.]

3. That which, though hid from ourselves, is known to God—

[It is but too possible for persons to “seem to be religious,” and to think themselves so, at the very time that they are under the influence of some habitual evil which proves that they “deceive their own selves, and that their religion is vain^e.” The characteristic mark of the true Christian is sincerity: he is “an Israelite indeed, and without guile^f,” attending to all the commandments equally, without partiality, and without hypocrisy^g. But the persons we refer to are partial in every part of their duty. *Their repentance* is partial: they mourn, not so much for sin, as for the consequences of their sin; nor yet for the consequences, as they respect God and his honour, but only as they respect themselves and their happiness. Even in relation to themselves, they are not grieved that sin has defiled their consciences, and hardened their hearts, but only that it has injured their character, or brought guilt and misery upon their souls. *Their faith* also is partial: it has respect to Christ as a Priest to atone for them, but not as a King to rule over them: it receives Christ for righteousness, but not for sanctification. Moreover, whilst they profess to trust in God for spiritual blessings, they cannot stay themselves upon him for temporal things, but are as ready to sink under their trials, as if they knew not from whence they came, and to give way to

^d Rom. ii. 17—23.

^e Jam. i. 26.

^f John i. 47.

^g 1 Tim. v. 21. Jam. iii. 17.

to despondency as if they had no God to flee unto. *Their Love* too is partial: it is confined to those of their own sect and party, and knows little of that expansive benevolence which was so exemplified in the Lord Jesus, when he laid down his life for the whole world, not excepting even his bitterest enemies. Moreover, *their zeal* is also partial: it is ardent in some things; in one it is violent against superstition and forms of man's appointment; and in another it exclaims against schisms, and heresies, and divisions: but it finds no scope for exercise in things which would bear upon their own peculiar habits: it is active enough in things that gratify their feelings, and that tend to exalt their character, but slow to engage in any thing that appears humiliating and self-denying. In a word, the hypocrite is neither uniform nor unreserved in any part of his obedience; but betrays his insincerity, whenever his interests, his habits, or his passions are to be sacrificed to God.]

Seeing then that hypocrisy is so extensive an evil, and that our Lord judged it necessary to caution his own immediate Disciples against it; we proceed,

II. To enforce his caution—

But what words can be sufficient for this purpose? What arguments can we use to impress upon your minds the necessity of being ever on your guard against so great an evil? Consider,

1. Its subtle nature—

[We are told that “Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and his ministers appear as ministers of righteousness^a,” from whence we may infer, that there is *no person* in whom hypocrisy may not find an asylum, *nor any act* wherein it may not have scope for exercise. It is the continual aim of Satan to infuse it into us, and by means of it to defile our very best actions. The pretexts too under which it can hide itself are innumerable. There is not any form which it cannot assume: and sanctity itself is its appropriate garb. What need have we then to watch against a principle which finds so easy admission into the heart, yet is so hard to be detected, and so difficult to be expelled! Let not any of us imagine that we are out of its reach; nor be too confident that we are free from its influence. Surely we should have a godly jealousy over ourselves in relation to it, and not only “search and try ourselves,” but pray that

“God

^a 2 Cor. xi. 13, 15.

"God himself would search and try us, in order to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting¹." Let us never forget that "there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, whilst yet they are not washed from their filthiness^k;" and that there are many who "have a name to live, but are really dead," before God^l.]

2. Its defiling influence—

[As "leaven," a very small measure of it will soon "leaven the whole lump." It not only debases the act with which it is more immediately connected, but renders the whole soul abominable in the sight of God. We may profess ourselves the Lord's people^m— — and take delight in his waysⁿ — — — and seem most exemplary in our conduct^o — — — and yet have it all rendered vain and worthless by means of this accursed principle. What a painful thought is this, that we may be apprehending ourselves most holy and most exemplary, and yet, after all, may be found to have deceived our own souls! But so it is: "A man may think himself to be something, and yet in the sight of God be nothing but an hypocrite and self-deceiver^p." Let us then spare no pains to purge out the old leaven, that we may be a new lump: and, as the Jews at their Passover were indefatigable in their exertions to banish leaven from their houses, so let us, now that Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, labour to banish it from our hearts, and to keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth^q."]

3. Its fatal effects—

[Awful indeed are the denunciations of God's wrath against hypocrites, insomuch that to "have our portion with them" is to be exposed to his heaviest indignation^r. Nor is it gross hypocrisy only, such as is manifest to all, that so provokes his displeasure; but that also which is the most secret and refined: "the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath," and *that* too whilst they are flattering themselves perhaps with expecting an accumulated weight of glory^s. And O how fearful will be their disappointment! How distressing too will it be to their more upright friends, to miss them in the regions of bliss, and to find that, after all their professions of godliness, they were not counted worthy of the kingdom of heaven^t! Consider these things beforehand. Consider that your state will be fixed by HIM, "whose eyes are as a flame of fire," who "searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins," and who

¹ Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^k Prov. xxx. 12.

^l Rev. iii. 1.

^m Isai. xlviii. 1, 2.

ⁿ Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

^o Isai. lviii. 2, 3.

^p Gal. vi. 3.

^q 1 Cor. v. 6—8.

^r Matt. xxiv. 51.

^s Job. xxxvi. 13.

^t Job. xx. 4—7.

who will give to every man according to his works: and know assuredly, that whatever be now thought of your state, you will then stand or fall, according to your real character*.

If you are disposed to ask, What shall I do to avoid this doom, I would suggest to you a few words of]

ADVICE:

1. Be not too confident of your own integrity—

[However unconscious we may be of our latent hypocrisy, it is well to be diffident of ourselves. Even Paul himself cultivated this kind of humility, choosing rather to cast himself on the mercy of his God, than to place too great a reliance on his own integrity*. We say not, that you may not rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience; for this the Apostle did†: “but we recommend it to you to “rejoice with trembling:” for we are sure that such a frame of mind is most favourable to a discovery of our real principles, and most conducive to our ultimate salvation.]

2. Commit yourselves to the care of your gracious God and Saviour—

[To whom can you look for succour, but to that blessed Saviour, who has promised to “keep the feet of his saints?” He alone can “put truth in your inward parts,” and keep you “sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ.” Yet, however preserved by his grace, you will need to be washed continually in the fountain of his blood. Sprinkle yourselves then continually with his precious blood: from thence derive all your hope and peace; and doubt not but that he will both “keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy‡.”]

* 1 Tim. v. 24, 25.

† 1 Cor.—iv. 3—5.

‡ 2 Cor. i. 12.

§ Jude, ver. 24.

DCCLXXII.

GOD TO BE FEARED, BUT NOT MAN.

Luke xii. 4, 5. *I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*

AN undue regard to the good opinion of mankind operates to the production of two apparently opposite

opposite effects, namely, an hypocritical assumption of the religious character, and a cowardly concealment of it. Moreover, the same persons may be alternately tempted to both these evils, according as the one kind of dissimulation or the other may be best suited to their present circumstances. The persons most likely to feel their influence, are those who have lately begun to venerate religion, and to desire the attainment of it in their hearts. Hence our blessed Lord earnestly cautioned his Disciples against them. He began with guarding them against hypocrisy, which was the leaven that pervaded all the Pharisees; and then he guarded them against the fear of man (which would induce them to put their light under a bushel); and, as the best antidote to it, to cultivate the fear of God^a.

The subject of our text cannot be rendered more clear by any artificial arrangement of it, nor can the words be treated in any better order than that in which they stand: we shall therefore follow them simply, without any particular division.

The fear of man is a very powerful and prevailing evil—

[Scarcely does any one begin to feel a desire after salvation, but he is beset immediately with this temptation; though perhaps he never regarded the good opinion of men so far as to be deterred by it from the commission of any sin, now he is filled with apprehensions lest this or that person should despise him. He scarcely dares look grave, lest his friends should think him melancholy; nor will he venture to acknowledge any compunction for his past iniquities, lest they should say that he is going mad. He is persuaded in his mind that they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are on the whole in the best way; but he dares not join himself to them for fear of participating in their reproach: nor dares he shew any attachment to a Minister of Christ, from whom he would wish to derive instruction, lest he should be classed with his followers. He dares not even go to a place of worship where Christ

is

is more faithfully preached, lest he should be loaded with some opprobrious name. To bear an open testimony against sin, or to vindicate the ways of righteousness, would be an effort which he could not even contemplate without dread: so tied is he and bound with this ideal chain—the good opinion of the world.

If he have been enabled to surmount these first difficulties, he still is in bondage to fears of another kind. His father perhaps threatens to disinherit him, his master to dismiss him, his patron to turn his back upon him: the question then arises in his mind, How shall I sustain this trial? and then, to avoid the cross, he sacrifices his conscience, declines from the ways of God, and goes back again to the world: “tribulation and persecution arising because of the word, he presently is offended.” Nor is it uncommon for those who have appeared bold in the cause of Christ, to turn back, when they are called to “resist unto blood.” When Paul was first called before the Roman Emperor, there was not found one single Christian that dared to stand by him; “every one of them forsook him.” And God alone knows how any of us should act, if, like Daniel or the Hebrew Youths, we were called to seal the truth with our blood.]

But to be governed by this principle, is both impious and absurd—

[God expressly commands us not to harbour it in our bosoms: “Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled^b.” He cautions us against it as a fatal snare: “The fear of man bringeth a snare^c.” He represents it as quite absurd: “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord, thy Maker^d.” And in our text he shews how impotent man is, and unworthy to be regarded as an object of fear^e. Man may prevail so far as to kill our bodies; but this is the utmost that he can do. In doing this, he may exercise his ingenuity to put us to the most cruel torture: but God has graciously appointed that the body should not endure all that our enemies might wish to inflict: the soul will take its flight, if the body be too violently assailed, and will leave the body insensible to all that the most insatiate malice can devise^f. Now we grant that this is an evil: the Christian cannot be indifferent to pain, and anguish, and death; but still these things are not so formidable as to justify his
being

^b 1 Pet. iii. 14.

^c Prov. xxix. 25.

^d Isai. li. 7, 8, 12, 13.

^e Job. iii. 17—19.

^f Compare the 13th ver. of Isai. li with the text.

being influenced by the fear of man. If, indeed, there were no state beyond the present, and no Being that was superior to man, and able either to recompense our sufferings or to inflict others more severe, then there were some reason why we should fear man: but]

God is the more proper object of fear—

[*Him* we ought to fear; indeed “he is very greatly to be feared;” for “with him is terrible majesty:” we should therefore “stand in awe of him,” and “fear him always,” and “walk in his fear all the day long.” We should do nothing without considering first whether it will please or displease him: if we have reason to think that it will displease him, we should not for the whole world presume to do it; nor should we neglect any thing which our conscience tells us will be pleasing in his sight. In every thing that we do, we should have respect to his will, as *the reason*; his word, as *the rule*; and his glory, as *the end*, of our actions. In comparison of his favour, all earthly considerations should dwindle into nothing: the allurements or the terrors of the world should be alike contemptible in our eyes: they should weigh no more with us than the small dust upon the balance.]

There is very abundant reason why we should fear him—

[The circumstance of our being his creatures, formed by him for the promotion of his glory, should of itself induce us to regard him chiefly, him continually, him exclusively: and the circumstance of his having redeemed us by the blood of his dear Son, should constrain us irresistibly to live altogether for him. But the consideration urged in our text is that which we are more particularly called to notice.

God can destroy the body, as well as man^f. He commissioned worms to execute his vengeance on a prince that robbed him of his glory^g. And on many of his own peculiar people also has he inflicted punishment, visiting them with sickness and death for their transgressions against him^h. In this respect then, to say the least, he is on a par with men, and is as much to be feared as they. *But he can also wound the soul*, which man can never touch. The saints of old, instead of being grieved at “the spoiling of their goods, took it joyfully.” Paul and Silas, when their backs were torn with scourges, and their feet fastened in the stocks, so far from having their spirits hurt, were filled with unutterable joy, and “sang praises to God at midnight.”

And
^f “After he hath killed.” ^g Acts xii. 23. ^h 1 Cor. xi. 30.

And every saint is privileged to "take pleasure in afflictions," and to "glory in tribulations;" so little is it in the power of man to hurt his soul. But what distress cannot God inflict? Look at Judas: look at many also at this day, who, like him, "choose strangling rather than life." Whence arise the numerous suicides that we hear of continually? God lets loose his wrath upon the souls of men on account of their iniquities; and then they are so miserable that they cannot endure to live. The saints themselves, too, are sometimes made to experience his frowns: and then how inexpressible is their anguish! "A wounded spirit who can bear?" Here then God shews his superiority over man, even in this life. But *God's power extends also to the future world*: he can cast the soul into hell; and can raise up the body also, and re-unite it to the soul, and make them monuments of his everlasting vengeance. Oh! "who knoweth the power of his anger?" Who can tell us what it is to lie down in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and to spend an eternity in that place, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?" Read a faint description of their state, drawn by the hand of an angel¹; and you will then see that "it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Now judge *whom* you ought to fear². Now see why our blessed Lord so often, and so emphatically, repeats the same word, "*Fear not man; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; Fear God; yea, I say unto you, Fear HIM.*" Alas! that the stupidity of our hearts should ever make such repetitions *needful*! but since our blessed Lord has condescended to make use of them, I pray God that our obduracy may not also render them *ineffectual*.]

We acknowledge that these considerations are awful; but we state them to you as proofs of our love—

[To speak of the wrath to come is always painful, and frequently offensive. Persons are apt to imagine that we take pleasure in alarming the minds of men; and they even conceive of us as disturbers of the public peace, and as enemies to the happiness of our fellow-creatures. But was this the character of our blessed Lord? or did he feel any thing but love, whilst he gave these solemn admonitions? Yea, did he not account this fidelity to their souls the strongest expression of his regard? Hear how carefully he marks this in his address to them: "I say unto you, *my friends*." Permit me then to say, that, however men may be disposed to represent our fidelity as an indication of harsh-

ness,

¹ Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

² Jer. x. 6, 7.

ness, we are actuated only by a spirit of love, and are in reality your best *friends*. Many there are, indeed, who *call themselves* your friends, who would give advice directly contrary to ours: they would say, ‘Do not indulge any foolish fears about the wrath of God; He is a very merciful Being; and you have nothing to fear at his hands. But think how absurd you will appear in the sight of all sensible men: think how you are ruining all your prospects in life: think what troubles you will bring upon yourself by all these needless singularities: shake off all these groundless apprehensions: turn your back upon those who would fill you with false alarms: and act so as to ensure the approbation and esteem of all around you.’ This, I say, is the common advice of parents, of brethren, and of many others who *call themselves* friends: but think a moment whether *their* counsel or that of *Christ* is to be preferred: *they* say, Fear *man*, but not *God*; and Christ says, Fear *God*, but not *man*. Truly, Brethren, we *must* join in the advice of Him who has *proved* himself your friend; has proved it by laying down his life for you: and we must declare to you that, whilst the fear of *man* is folly in the extreme, “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and the praise of *it* endureth for ever.”]

With this feeling, we urge them upon your minds with some additional arguments—

[The minor sorts of persecution are unworthy the regard of a rational man. What signifies a reproachful name, or the *contempt* of those who *contemn* God? You should rather account it your honour to be so treated¹. But whatever be the cross you are called to bear, God has provided abundant consolation under it^m. Only submit to your trials with meekness and patienceⁿ, and you may defy the confederate hosts of earth and hell^o. Think how your Saviour suffered, not only “enduring the cross, but *despising* the shame;” and arm yourselves with the same mind^p, “rejoicing that you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake.” If you are tempted at any time to obey man rather than God, then look to the eternal world, and consider whether temporal joys or sorrows deserve a thought in comparison of those that are eternal. Think of the noble army of martyrs who are gone before, sent by *men*, as it were, in a *fiery chariot* to heaven: do they *regret* that they loved not their lives unto death? Thus, setting eternity before you, implore help from your God and Saviour: then shall you be found “faithful unto death, and finally obtain a crown of life.”]

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 14.

^m 2 Cor. i. 5. Matt. v. 10—12.

ⁿ What dignity was there in that conduct of Jeremiah! Jer. xxvi. 14.

^o Isai. li. 5—9.

^p 1 Pet. iv. 1. Heb. xii. 3.

DCCLXXIII.

CAUTION AGAINST COVETOUSNESS.

Luke xii. 15. *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness.*

THE instructions which our Lord conveyed to his Disciples almost always arose out of something that was immediately before him; so attentive was he to improve every occasion for their good. This was fraught with many advantages; for it tended to impress every truth more forcibly on their minds, and to shew them how to render all events subservient to their own spiritual welfare. It was a trifling circumstance, which of itself did not seem to afford any particular occasion for remark, that gave rise to the discourse before us. A man who had been listening to him for some time, apprehending that, as he spake with such authority, he could easily prevail to settle a point in dispute between his brother and himself, requested his interposition; "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." But our Lord, seeing that the man was more intent on his temporal than on his spiritual advancement, not only declined the office, as not being within his commission, but began to caution his Disciples against that covetousness, of which they now saw so striking an example.

A caution so solemnly given to them, cannot but deserve the attention of his followers in every age; and I pray God that the importance of it may be felt by every one of us, whilst we shew,

I. How we may know whether we are under the influence of this evil principle.

It is not by overt acts of dishonesty merely that we are to judge of this, but by the workings of our hearts in reference to the things of this world. We may judge of it,

1. From the manner in which we *seek* them—

[Earthly things may certainly be desired, provided that desire be regulated by the necessities of our nature, and subordinated to the will of our heavenly Father. But if we

desire them *for themselves*, or in an undue degree, then immediately are we guilty of that very sin which is reprov'd in our text. If we desire them for themselves, we shew that we think there is some inherent good in them: whereas they are altogether worthless, except as far as they are necessary for our support, and for the strengthening of our bodies to serve the Lord. All beyond mere food and raiment is an empty bubble. To invest earthly things with any inherent excellency, is to put them in the place of God, and to make idols of them: moreover, if our thoughts run out after them more than after God and heavenly things, if the pursuit of them be more delightful to us than the exercises of devotion, and, above all, if we will violate the dictates of conscience, or neglect spiritual duties in order to advance our temporal interest, What is this but covetousness? Can any one doubt whether such a preference to earthly things be sinful? Suppose, for instance, that any man follows an unlawful trade, or a lawful trade in an unlawful way, acquiring his gains from sources which he would be ashamed to confess, and afraid to have discovered; is he not under the influence of covetousness? Does he not prefer money before a good conscience, and the acquisition of wealth before the approbation of his God? Is this a "setting of his affections on things *above*, and not on the things on the earth?" Hear what an inspired Apostle speaks respecting the criminality and danger of such desires: "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, because they *mind* earthly things^a." It is not *every* degree of attention to earthly things that he condemns; but such a desire after them as is inordinate, and such a pursuit of them as militates against the welfare of the soul: and, whatever *we* may call it, *God* calls it covetousness, and declares it to be idolatry^b.]

2. From the manner in which we *enjoy* them—

[As all desire after them is not prohibited, so neither is all enjoyment of them; for "God hath given us all things richly to enjoy." But what if we feel complacency in the idea of wealth, and place a confidence in it as a barrier against the calamities of life; Is not this the very sin against which the prophet Habakkuk denounces a most awful woe? "Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil^{bb}." It is, in truth, to act the part of the rich fool in the Gospel, and to say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry?" We are very apt to imagine that the satisfaction which we take in the contemplation of our wealth, is nothing but an expres-

sion

^a Phil. iii. 18, 19.

^b Col. iii. 5.

^{bb} Hab. ii. 9.

sion of thankfulness to God: but it is, for the most part, a "glorying in riches" (which is expressly forbidden^c); and a "saying to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence." The sentiments of Job on this head were far more correct than those of the generality even of enlightened Christians: "If," says he, "I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much, this were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for then I should have denied the God that is above^d." If it be asked, How such a construction can reasonably be put on a sensation of the soul, which appears both innocent and praise-worthy? I answer, That God is the true and only rest of the soul^e; and that, in proportion as we look to the creature for comfort or support, our hearts of necessity depart from him^f. To be the one source of happiness to his creatures, is his prerogative; and his glory he will not give to another: for "the Lord our God is a jealous God."]

3. From the manner in which we *support the loss* of them—

[Christianity is far from inculcating a stoical apathy, or rendering us strangers to the common feelings of mankind: but it gives us a principle, which is able to support us under trials, and to fill us with joy in the midst of tribulations. In a word, it presents us with a view of God as our God, and shews us, that nothing in this world can either add to, or take from, the happiness of him who has so rich a portion. This is the principle which enabled Job, under the loss of all his worldly possessions, to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away: blessed be the name of the Lord." Now the want of this resignation argues an undue value for the things of this world. If, under an apprehension of some loss, we are filled with anxiety, so as to be quite unfitted for an attention to our spiritual concerns; if, on having sustained that loss, we give way to vexation and grief, instead of rejoicing that we have in God an all-sufficient portion; do we not then in effect say, like Micah, when he had lost his idols, "They have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" Assuredly this is an undeniable mark of covetousness: indeed God himself puts this construction upon it: "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have^g." When we are truly delivered from this evil principle, we shall be able to say with the Apostle, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content: I know both how to be abased, and how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need^h."]

Our

^c Jer. ix. 23.

^d Job xxxi. 25, 28.

^e Ps. cxvi. 7.

^f Jer. xvii. 5.

^g Heb. xiii. 5.

^h Phil. iv. 11, 12.

Our next inquiry must be,

II. Why our Lord so earnestly guards us against it—

The terms in which he expresses the caution, are exceeding strong; "Take heed, and beware!" But there is abundant occasion for such earnestness; for covetousness is,

1. A common principle—

[The man who came to desire our Lord's interposition, seems not to have had the smallest idea that he was actuated by this unworthy principle; and probably would have complained of a want of charity in any one who should have imputed it to him. And so it is at this time. However ready we may be to notice it in others, we all overlook it in ourselves, and cloke it by the name of industry or prudential care; so that, if we were to give credit to every man's account of himself, we should not find this principle in the world. But it is deeply rooted in the heart of man^k, and as naturally adheres to the soul as the members to the body^l. Even good people still feel its existence and operation within them. Who has not to lament, that in his intercourse with the world he feels somewhat of an undue bias at times, inclining him to lean towards his own interests, and to decide a doubtful point in his own favour? We do not say, that a good man will *indulge* this principle, but that he will *feel* it; and that he will find within himself a necessity of being much upon his guard, to prevent it from warping his judgment and influencing his conduct. If this then be the case with respect to those who are crucified to the world, much more must it be so with those who are yet carnal and unrenewed.]

2. A delusive principle—

[We are apt to think that earthly things will make us happy: but our Lord tells us, in the words immediately following our text, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." The truth is, that man's happiness is altogether independent of earthly things. Hear how the prophet Habakkuk speaks on this subject: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation^m." This clearly proves, that, however destitute we may be

^k ὅραται καὶ φυλάσσειν.
^l Col. iii. 5

^m Mark vii. 21.
ⁿ Hab. iii. 17, 18.

be of all earthly comforts, our hearts may overflow with peace and joy: "we may be sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing, having nothing, and yet possessing all things." On the other hand, it is certain that a man may possess all that the world can give him, and yet be miserable; or, as Job expresses it, "In the midst of his sufficiency he may be in straits^a." How often do we see persons, after attaining more than they had ever expected or desired, far less happy than they were at the commencement of their career! We may appeal to the experience of all, whether the increase of their happiness have kept pace with the augmentation of their wealth? We are well assured, that the more sanguine any person's expectations of happiness are from the acquisition of wealth, the greater will his disappointments be; and that every human being must sooner or later confess with Solomon, that all below the sun is "vanity and vexation of spirit."

3. A debasing principle—

[It is worthy of observation, that the word 'lucre' occurs but four times in the New Testament, and every time has the term 'filthy' annexed to it. Nor is this without reason; for covetousness defiles and debases the soul as much as any principle of our fallen nature. Wherever it exists, it eats out every good principle, and calls forth and strengthens every bad principle, in our fallen nature. How feeble are the operations of honour, friendship, love, compassion, when covetousness has gained an ascendant in the heart! On the other hand, what injustice, falsehood, wrath, and malice will this horrid principle produce! Well may it be said, "The love of money is the root of all evil;" for there is scarcely an evil in the world which may not arise from it. The opposition between this principle and every Christian virtue, is strongly intimated in the advice given by St. Paul to Timothy^o: and the utter abhorrence in which it is held by God, is marked^p, yea marked with an emphasis not exceeded in any part of the Sacred Volume: "An heart they have exercised with covetous practices, cursed children^q." O that we were all duly sensible of its hatefulness and baseness!]

4. A destructive principle—

[See it, in whomsoever it prevails, how it militates against the welfare of the soul, and destroys its eternal interests. The Rich Youth, in spite of all his amiableness, renounced all hope in Christ, rather than he would part with his

^a Job xx. 22.

^o 1 Tim. vi. 10, 11. Mark the connexion between these two verses.

^p Ps. x. 3,

^q 2 Pet. ii. 14.

his possessions'. The hearers of the prophet Ezekiel, notwithstanding all their approbation of his ministry and their professions of personal regard, could never be prevailed upon to renounce and mortify this evil propensity"; and we read of some in Isaiah's days, whom neither the frowns nor chastisements of Jehovah could reclaim from it'. The great proportion of those who make a profession of religion in our day, are like the thorny-ground hearers, in whom "the good seed is choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, so that they bring forth no fruit to perfection". But the most terrible of all examples is that of Demas, who, after having attained such eminence in the Christian Church as to be twice joined with St. Luke by Paul himself in his salutations to the saints, was turned aside at last, and ruined by this malignant principle: "Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world". Thus it will operate wherever it is indulged: it will have the same effect as "loading our feet with thick clay," when we are about to run a race; and will shut the door of heaven against us, when we apply for admission there. Of this, God has faithfully warned us; and, to fix the warning more deeply on our minds, he even appeals to ourselves respecting the justice of the sentence, and the certainty of its execution: "Know ye not that the covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?"

To improve the subject, and assist you in mortifying this corrupt principle, we recommend you to consider,

1. The shortness of human life—

[Who knows not that our life is but "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away?" Shall we then be anxious about matters which will be so soon terminated? Should we not rather live as pilgrims and sojourners, that are passing onward towards their eternal home? It will soon be of not the smallest moment to us whether we were rich or poor. The instant that the rich man's soul was required of him, his riches profited him not; they could not procure him so much as a drop of water to cool his tongue: nor did the troubles of Lazarus leave any sting to interrupt or lessen his joys, when once he was safely lodged in Abraham's bosom. Let us then, like the holy Apostle, "die daily:" let us "weep as though we wept not, and rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and possess as though we possessed not, and use the world as though we used it not; because the fashion of this world passeth away".]

2. The

' Matt. xix. 22.

" Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

* Isai. lvii. 17.

' Luke viii. 14.

" 2 Tim. iv. 10.

* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

' 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

2. The vanity of those excuses by which men justify their sin—

[Every one has some cloke wherewith to cover his sin. One says, I only desire a competency. But a competency, in God's estimation, may be a very different thing from what it is in ours: we may be desiring so many hundreds a year; but he says, "Having food and raiment, be therewith content." Another says, I care not for myself, but only for my family: and must I not provide for them? But we must no more covet an earthly portion for them than for ourselves: the welfare of their souls should be our great concern for them, as well as for ourselves. Another says, I am poor, and therefore cannot be supposed to be under the influence of covetousness. But the *principle* of covetousness may be as strong in a beggar as in any other person: for envy and discontent are as much branches of covetousness, as dishonesty or avarice can be. To all then, I would say, Beware of the deceitfulness of sin, and the treachery of your own hearts; and be afraid, lest, after being acquitted by your fellow-creatures, you should at last be condemned by your God².]

3. The infinite excellency of eternal things—

[As the Apostle says, "Be not drunk with wine, *wherein is excess*; but be *filled* with the Spirit," so I would say, Covet not earthly things, wherein is excess; but covet heavenly things even to the utmost possible fulness; for in them there is no excess. It is not possible to desire too earnestly, or to seek too diligently, an interest in Christ: nor can you take too great delight in the enjoyment of him, or fear too much the loss of his favour. Here is scope for all the energies of our minds. In reference to heavenly things then I would say, Covet earnestly the best gifts: enlarge your desires to the utmost extent of your capacity to receive, and of God's ability to bestow. However wide you open your mouth, God will fill it.]

* See 1 Tim. vi. 9. This passage is not generally understood. It speaks of the *inclination* or *principle*; βυλόμενοι πλεονεξούν. And the danger of self-deceit in relation to it is fully stated. Eph. v. 5—7.

DCCLXXIV.

REPENTANCE.

Luke xiii. 5. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

TWICE are these words repeated by our Lord within

within the space of three verses. And wherefore are they so repeated? Our Lord intended to check that common propensity which we all have to judge others; and to lead us rather to judge ourselves; and to prepare for that awful judgment which shall ere long be passed upon ourselves. Some of his hearers, taking occasion from what he had just spoken, respecting the danger of persons delaying to seek reconciliation with God till they were hurried unprepared into his presence, told him of the Galileans, who had been slain by Pilate in the very act of offering their sacrifices, and whose blood had been thereby mingled with their sacrifices. Our Lord, seeing that they intended to insinuate that this calamity was a judgment from God on account of some enormous wickedness, rectified their error, and taught them to look to themselves instead of judging and condemning others. Such calamities as these, he observed, fell indiscriminately on the righteous and the wicked: but there was a day coming when a just discrimination would be made, and the impenitent would be subjected to God's heaviest judgments.

After seeing what stress our blessed Lord laid upon these truths, we cannot be thought uncharitable if we open them to you according to their true import. In order to this we will point out,

I. The nature of Repentance—

All are ready to imagine that they know what repentance is; though, in truth, very few have any just notions respecting it. It consists in,

1. An humiliation before God on account of sin—

[Though this will not be disputed, few are aware what kind of humiliation is required.

It must be *deep*. It is not a slight superficial sorrow that will suffice. Sin is a dreadful evil, and must be lamented in a way suited to its enormity. Hear in what manner God himself teaches us to deplore the commission of it: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: *humble yourselves* under the mighty hand of God ^a." Such was the compunction

^a Jam. iv. 8—10.

tion-felt by the three thousand on the day of Pentecost^b: such also was the overwhelming sense of guilt which David felt^c: and such in every view was the contrition of Ezra, when he confessed before God his own and his people's iniquities^d. This is the humiliation which God requires; and every thing that falls short of this will he despise^e.

It must be *ingenuous*. There is a sorrow, like that of Felix or of Judas, arising from convictions of the natural conscience; and ending in despair. But this is in no respect acceptable to God; for it will consist with a love of sin, and an hatred of God's law; and the person who is impressed with it would prefer a life of sin, provided only he might be assured of escaping the punishment attendant on it. Our sorrow should resemble that of the Corinthian Church, when they had seen their error, and were humbled for it, with "a sorrow which wrought in them a repentance not to be repented of:" "For behold," says the Apostle, "this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter^f." In them we behold what we consider as eminently characterizing true repentance, namely, an ingenuous shame on account of their past conduct, a readiness to justify God in any judgments he should inflict on them, an hatred of their sin, and a determination through grace to walk more circumspectly in future: and wherever such an experience is, there is the grace of God in truth^g.

It must be *abiding*. Transient emotions, of whatever kind they be, can never be regarded as constituting true repentance. Pharaoh's confessions^h, and Saul'sⁱ, appeared to indicate a change of heart: but no real change was wrought in them, as is evident from their reverting almost immediately again to their former ways. The generality, if they had attained the humiliation of Ahab, would be ready to account themselves real penitents^k: but his subsequent conduct shewed the insincerity of all his professions. Far different from this must our contrition be, if ever we would be accepted of our God: we must retain the impressions which have been made upon us: we must say with Hezekiah, "I will go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul:" and, instead of accounting our acceptance with God a reason for
putting

^b Acts ii. 37.^c Ps. xxxviii. 4. & li. 3.^d Ezr. ix. 5, 6.

Ps. li. 17.

^e 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.^f Ezek. xx. 43, 44.^g Exod. ix. 27. & x. 16, 17.^h 1 Sam. xxiv. 16—18. & xxvi. 21.ⁱ 1 Kin. xxi. 27—29. & xxii. 27.^k 1 Isai. xxxviii. 15.

putting off this frame of mind, we should regard it rather as a motive to still deeper humiliation. This is the design of God in exercising mercy towards us^m; and it is the inseparable effect, where that mercy is received arightⁿ.]

2. A turning to God in newness of life—

[This also will be acknowledged as essential to true repentance. But let not this change be mistaken :

It must be *cordial* ; not the service of a slave under the influence of fear and dread, but the result of a conviction that sin is an intolerable bondage, and that the service of God is perfect freedom. Whatever change proceeds not from the heart, is mere hypocrisy^o; that which characterizes sound conversion, engages all the faculties of the soul^p. Thus it is represented by Solomon in his intercessory prayer^q: and agreeable to their representation is the direction given to us by the prophet Joel: “Turn ye even to me *with all your heart*, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning^r.”

It must be *progressive*. Conversion is not a work that is accomplished all at once, or ever so perfect in this life, but that we need to be pressing forward for higher attainments. Even Paul himself, towards the close of his life, did “not consider himself as having attained perfection, or apprehended all for which he had himself been apprehended of Christ Jesus: and hence he, like a person in a race, forgot all that was behind, and reached forward for that which was before^s.” As the body, though perfect in its parts even in the earliest infancy, grows in every part till it arrives at manhood; so does the new man advance toward “the measure of the stature of Christ^t.” We should “grow in grace;” and so grow as to make our “profit^uing to appear.” We may not indeed be able to see any actual advance at very short intervals; any more than we can see the advance of the sun every minute: but yet we perceive after a time that the sun has proceeded in its course; and in like manner must our path be like the shining light, which “shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” We must be “going on unto perfection,” and aspire after that which is proposed to us as the proper object of our ambition; namely, “to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^v.”

It must be *uniform*. Nothing under heaven is to divert us from our duty. We are not ever to be influenced by times or circumstances, so as to decline a positive duty through fear of man, or to commit a positive evil for the sake of any earthly advantage. The changes which we see in the conduct of St. Paul, did not proceed from any *deviation from* principle, but from

^m Rom. ii. 4.

^p Jer. xxiv. 7.

^q Phil. iii. 12—14.

^o Ezek. xvi. 63.

^p 2 Chron. vi. 37, 38.

^r Eph. iv. 13.

^s Jer. iii. 10.

^t Joel ii. 12.

^u Col. iv. 12.

from a strict *adherence to principle*. His one object was to save the souls of men: and in things that were non-essential, he accommodated himself to their habits and prejudices, in order to promote his main design: but when he saw that any evil was likely to arise from a particular act of conformity, he was as immovable as a rock. Thus we may vary our conduct on particular occasions, provided we can appeal to God that we are actuated by a regard for the welfare of others, and not by any personal considerations of our own. But in no instance whatever must this principle be extended so far as to violate any known duty or the dictates of our own conscience: life itself must be of no value in our eyes in comparison of God's honour, and the preservation of a conscience void of offence towards God and man.

It must be *unreserved*. Not only must we labour to undo what we have done amiss, by making restitution of ill-gotten gain, and warning those whom we have led into sin, but we must strive to mortify sin of every kind in every degree. Every man has some "sin that more easily besets him," and to which he will be more strongly tempted. This sin is different in different persons; in one, pride; in another, passion; in another, lust; in another, covetousness; in another, ambition and the love of praise; in another, sloth; but, whatever it be, our victory over it is a just criterion of our state: if it lead us captive, we are yet carnal and unrenewed: whatever repentance we may fancy ourselves to have experienced, it has all been ineffectual; we are yet in our sins; we are "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." A right eye must be plucked out, if it cause us to offend, and a right hand must be amputated: no alternative remains to us, but to part with that, or to suffer the miseries of hell*.

Such is the view which God himself gives us of repentance; and to this alone does he annex any hope of salvation: "Repent, and turn yourselves from *all* your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin[†]."

These views of repentance will appear in all their importance, if we consider,

II. The necessity of it—

The word which we translate 'likewise,' may possibly be intended to mark a resemblance between the calamities that awaited the impenitent Jews, and those which had befallen the persons just spoken of^{*}. But, as we are more interested in what relates to ourselves, we shall rather take a general view of the subject,

* Mark. ix, 43—48.

† Ezek. xviii. 30.

* In ver. 3. it is *ἀσάλευτος*, and in the text *ἀμείωνος*.

subject, than attempt a parallel, which would be more curious than useful. We say then in reference to repentance, that the necessity for it is,

1. Indispensable—

[On this, eternal happiness and eternal misery depend ; “except we repent, we must all perish.” It is not for us to say what God *might* do: it is sufficient to know what he *will* do. He has appointed repentance, as the means of obtaining reconciliation with him: and he has given his own Son to die for us, in order that, the guilt of sin having been expiated by the blood of the cross, he may be able to receive returning sinners in a perfect consistency with the demands of law and justice. Let this matter be clearly understood. He has not appointed repentance to atone for sin ; for if we could shed rivers of tears, they never could wash away the smallest sin: it is the blood of Christ only, that can cleanse from sin: no other fountain ever was, or ever can be, opened for sin and for uncleanness, but that which issued from the wounds of our Redeemer. But repentance is necessary in order to prepare our souls for a worthy reception of the Divine mercies, and for a suitable improvement of them. Though therefore it cannot atone for sin, or merit any thing at the hands of God, it is indispensably necessary ; and, if we do not repent, we must for ever remain in the snare of the devil, and the gates of heaven will assuredly be closed against us^a. The declaration in our text will certainly be fulfilled : and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it ever fail. Know ye then, that whatever is implied in the “*perishing*” of an immortal soul, must be the portion of every impenitent sinner — — —]

2. Universal—

[There are authors, of no mean name, who have endeavoured to prove that there are some who need not to repent. Because our Lord says, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance ;” and, that “there is more joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance ;” they imagine; there is a class of persons whose natures are so pure, and their conduct so blameless, as not to have given any occasion for repentance. But the former of these passages relates to those who thought themselves righteous, and who, from a conceit of their being “whole,” despised the proffered aid of a physician^b: the latter evidently refers to those

^a 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

^b See Matt. ix. 12, 13. It might be interpreted of those who were renewed and made righteous by the Holy Spirit. But the former sense is more agreeable to the context.

those who have already been converted to God, and are as sheep living in the fold of Christ. Such persons are considered as secure, whilst those who are unconverted are in most imminent danger: and, as the recovery of a lost sheep affords more sensible pleasure to its owner, than the possession of an hundred that have not strayed; so the angels are filled with pre-eminent joy at the conversion of one, whom they had considered as in a lost and perishing condition^b. That these passages cannot be understood as sanctioning the idea that there are any persons so good as not to need repentance, must be evident to every one who considers what the Scriptures elsewhere speak respecting the universal state of man. St. Paul collects a multitude of texts, to prove that "there is none righteous, no, not one: that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: and that therefore every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God^c." "There is not a man that liveth and sinneth not," says Solomon. In many things we offend all, says St. James. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," says St. John, "and the truth is not in us." But where shall we find these persons who need no repentance? Will the advocates for this strange opinion venture to point out a person that possesses this high attainment? If they did, the person himself, unless peculiarly blinded by the devil, would contradict their testimony. But we will suppose this paragon of excellence produced: is he more righteous than Job, of whom God himself testified, that "there was none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil^d?" For argument sake, we will suppose him equal to Job: would he then not need to repent? Hear what Job says of himself; "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life. If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me^e." Let those then who will maintain such an unscriptural sentiment lay to heart that warning of the Almighty, "Thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me: behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned^f." If they will not humble themselves now, let them prepare to maintain their own cause against God in the day of judgment.

We

^b See Luke xv. 7. If this be interpreted as though it referred to sheep that have never strayed, it must then mean that they have not strayed *to such an extent* as others. But the other interpretation is far preferable.

^c Rom. iii. 9—19.

^e Job. ix. 20, 21, 30, 31.

^d Job. i. 8.

^f Jer. ii. 35.

We say then that the necessity of repentance is universal: and we intreat every one to apply the declaration to his own soul, "Except ye repent, ye shall ALL likewise perish."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who think themselves penitents—

[What has been spoken on the nature of repentance, may well lead us to examine ourselves, and to fear lest we should deceive our own souls. We intreat you all therefore to bear in mind the particulars which you have heard, and to try yourselves by them. If in any thing we appear to have pressed the point too far, let *the confession* which we always utter *at the Lord's supper*, be taken in connexion with it; and it will be found that we have not uttered a single sentiment which is not contained in that formulary.

And here we cannot but intreat all who are in the habit of frequenting the Lord's Table to inquire, whether their repentance be such as, in that prayer, they profess it to be. We are told by our Church what is required of them that come to the Lord's Supper, namely, 'To examine themselves whether they repent them *truly* of their former sins. This examination we now most earnestly recommend; lest, *in the midst of all "your sacrifices"* the wrath of God break forth against you, and you "perish" in a far more fearful manner than ever the "Galileans" did &.]

2. Those who desire to repent—

[Delay not one moment to execute your purpose, lest death find you unprepared to meet your God. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we would "persuade" you so to turn to him that you may have no reason to dread them. Yet remember not to address yourselves to the work of repentance in your own strength: for it is God alone who can give it you; and he has "exalted the Lord Jesus to his own right hand on purpose to give you repentance and remission of sins^h." If you are tempted to doubt whether he will bestow it upon *you*, know that "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentanceⁱ." In proof of that, we need only consider what is implied in the words of our text. When it is said, that "except we repent we shall all perish," we may fairly take the converse of it to be true, and conclude, that they who do repent shall not perish. O blessed truth, confirmed by thousands of positive declarations! Not to insist on that instructive parable of the Prodigal Son (which yet may be a source of comfort to every contrite soul); let that representation of God's love to penitents, which is given

us

ⁱ ver. 1.

^h Acts v. 31.

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 9.

us by the prophet Jeremiah, be duly considered, and you will need no other encouragement to turn unto God with your whole hearts^k. Behold then, our parting exhortation to every one amongst you is, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon!"^l]

^k Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

^l Isai. lv. 7.

DCCLXXV.

LIBERALITY TO THE POOR RECOMMENDED.

Luke xiv. 12—14. *Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*

IT is a thing yet to be learned in the religious world, that there is no part of Christian duty beneath the attention of those who hear the Gospel, or those who preach it. The Church is a building, which must be carried forward till its final completion. Its foundation must be laid; but in laying it, we must not imagine that it is of any use *of itself*; it is laid, in order to have a superstructure raised upon it; and the builder must advance in his work till he has "brought forth the top-stone." St. Paul would "not be always laying the foundation of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but would go on unto perfection." Thus we would do: and whatever our blessed Lord inculcated on his Disciples, that would we also inculcate on all who profess to belong to him.

Our Lord, dining at the house of a Pharisee on a Sabbath-day, set himself to correct some evils which he saw peculiarly predominant there. Amongst the company he perceived a spirit of ambition and self-preference; which he endeavoured to correct by a parable suited to the occasion. It should seem

too

too that the feast was sumptuous, or, at least, that none but rich people were invited to it: he therefore, to counteract the pride which such a banquet fostered and displayed, told them what kind of feasts he approved; and that, instead of laying out their money in sumptuous entertainments, he would have them rather to spend their money in making provision for the poor. In conformity with this precept, we shall endeavour to set before you some RULES and REASONS *for a proper expenditure of our money.*

I. Some rules—

Two are mentioned in our text;

1. Do not waste your money in giving entertainment to the rich—

[We must not construe this so strictly as to decline all friendly intercourse with our richer relatives or neighbours, or to refuse them the rights of hospitality; for kindness is due to them as well as to the poor, and doubtless may occasionally be exercised towards them in the way *apparently* forbidden in our text. But we must not affect high company, or spend money unnecessarily in entertaining them. Hospitality indeed is good; and we should “love it,” and not “be forgetful to entertain strangers; because some have thereby entertained angels unawares^b” but still this is essentially different from a fondness for parade and feasting; which, however vindicated as necessary to form connexions for one’s children, and to promote social intercourse, and to keep up one’s station in the world, is little else than sensuality and pride. To feast the rich, will involve us in great expense, which of course must lessen our means of doing good to the poor: therefore, though occasions may occur wherein we may not improperly exercise hospitality towards them, we must not find our pleasure in such feasts, nor should we devote to them any considerable portion of our income. The generality of persons account the keeping of high company, and the being able to entertain them in a splendid way, as the chief use of wealth; and they launch out into these kinds of expenses the very instant they have received such an accession of fortune as will enable them so to do. But we must shew ourselves of a different spirit, and not sanction by our example any such evil practices.]

2. Devote

^a 1 Tim. iii. 2. Tit. i. 6. 1 Pet. iv. 9.

^b Heb. xiii. 2.

2. Devote your property rather to the relieving and comforting of the poor—

[God has ordained that there shall always be poor amongst his people, in order that graces of every kind may be called forth into exercise among them^c. These therefore are to be the special objects of our care; but especially those among them whom God in his providence has visited with afflictions which incapacitate them for labour; “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.” The talents which God has committed to our care, are to be laid out with a particular reference to them. Under the Law, it was appointed that every person should lay up the tithe of his increase every third year, for the express purpose of feasting “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, in the courts of the Lord,” that all of them together might “eat and be satisfied^d.” In a similar manner, we also are enjoined at stated periods to “lay by us in store as God has prospered us^e,” and even those who are forced to work with their hands for their own maintenance, are yet required to labour the more, in order “that they may have to give to him that needeth^f.” It is true, that there is no need of throwing down all distinctions in society, and feasting with the poor on terms of strict equality; but to make them happy, should be an object near our hearts. Indeed it is, if I may so express myself, a godlike employment: for God himself has shewn a marked respect for the poor, in that “he has chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom^g.” He has set us an example of this very thing in the dispensation of his Gospel. In the verses following the text, he represents himself as having made a great feast, and invited many: and, because his invitations are slighted by the rich, the gay, the worldly, he says to his servants, “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind: yea, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled^h.” Thus, as by his Gospel he makes them pre-eminently partakers of his spiritual blessings, so we also, as far as our circumstances will admit of it, should make them partakers of our temporal blessings.]

This, though felt and acknowledged by us as a duty, needs yet to be enforced upon us, in order that it may be reduced to practice: we will therefore proceed to enforce it by,

II. Some

^c Deut. xv. 11.

^d Deut. xiv. 28, 29.

^e 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

^f Eph. iv. 28.

^g Jam. ii. 5.

^h ver. 16—23.

II. Some reasons—

The two things which men aim at in the disposal of their money, are pleasure and advantage: and it is from an idea that these are more to be obtained by feasting with the rich, that people almost universally prefer that method of expending their property. But we do not hesitate to say, that the mode of expending it which has been recommended to you has greatly the superiority in point,

1. Of gratification—

[We do not deny but that there is considerable pleasure in entertaining one's friends: we must however assert, that that pleasure is carnal in its nature, and transient in its duration. But the delight which arises from providing for the poor, and making them happy, is solid, refined, permanent. If it were nothing more than the thought of contributing to lessen the miseries to which human nature is exposed, it would be very delightful; the very sensation of sympathy is exquisite: but the thought of being God's messenger to them for good, and the hope that "by our means thanksgivings will abound to God¹," and that our heavenly Parent will be adored and magnified through us; *this* is a sensation which even an angel might envy. We can easily conceive the comfort which an indigent fellow-creature feels in being relieved from his distress; yet is that not to be compared with the happiness excited in the bosom of him who administers the relief: for One who cannot err has told us, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." The comfort of the relieved continues only whilst the pressure of his calamity is removed: but the donor may look back at the distance of many years, and feel again the same delights, which he experienced at the first communication of his alms.

Amongst the many considerations which tend to perpetuate his comfort, one in particular is, that, in administering to the poor, he has ministered to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Christ has condescended to identify himself with his poor members, and to regard every thing which is done for them, not only as done *for* him, but as done personally *to* him². Oh! what a thought is this to one who feels his obligations to Christ! I suppose there is scarcely an enlightened Christian in the universe, who has not envied the women who had the privilege of "ministering to him of their substance³." But the man who delights in comforting the poor, occupies their province; and is privileged to view, as it were, the very person

¹ 2 Cor. ix. 12.² Matt. xxv, 35—40.³ Luke viii. 3.

person of Christ in all such guests. Verily, he can have but little love for his Saviour who does not feel more delight in this thought, than in all the gratifications which high company and a well-spread table ever afforded.]

2. Of benefit—

[All the benefit that the feasting of the rich brings with it, is, the getting a good name among them, and the being invited to their feasts in return. The latter of these is what our Lord rather teaches us to dread, inasmuch as it cancels the obligation we have conferred, and makes our expenditure in vain^a. It is to be lamented however, that amongst his reputed followers, the being invited to feasts is no great object of dread. But the man who feasts the poor, can look for no recompence from them; (except indeed in their blessings and their prayers;) but from God, he shall be recompensed an hundred-fold.

The communications of grace and peace^b shall abound towards him whose delight is in doing good: "having watered others he shall be watered himself." This is declared by an Inspired Writer in the most express and most eloquent terms: "If thou deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; if when thou seest the naked, thou cover him, and hide not thyself from thine own flesh; if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not^c." What a glorious recompense is this!

But there is a time coming when his recompence shall be complete. "At the resurrection of the just," God will acknowledge all that has been done for the poor as "a loan lent to him; and he will repay it" all with interest^d. We take for granted indeed that the person is a believer in Christ, and that, in relieving the poor, he does it for Christ's sake, and not from an idea of establishing a righteousness of his own. This must certainly be supposed; else the liberality, however great, will only turn to the confusion of him who exercises it, and prove a foundation of sand to him who builds upon it: but, supposing the person's state to be right before God in other respects, and his motives to be pure in the distribution of his alms, we do not hesitate to say, that he treasures up a rich reward for himself in the day that Christ shall judge the world; insomuch that a cup of cold water only that has been given by him from right principles, "shall in no wise lose its reward."

^a ver. 12. ^b Isai. lviii. 7—11. ^c Prov. xix. 17. 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

reward." Jehovah himself in that day shall make a feast, a marriage-feast for his Son: and to it will he invite those who for his sake provided for the poor. There shall they sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; and be regaled with all the delights of Paradise. Well is it said in reference to that day, "Blessed are they which are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb^a." Yes; in the words of our text it is said, "Thou shalt be blessed; but *how* blessed the liberal man shall be, none but God himself can fully declare.]

We sum up the whole in two words of ADVICE—

1. Accept God's invitations to you—

[You have already heard that in his Gospel he has spread a feast, even "a feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well-refined^c." The persons whom he invites are; not "the rich who think themselves in need of nothing, but the wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked^d." As his servants, we invite you all; and declare to you, that the poorer you are, and the more unworthy in your own apprehensions, the more acceptable you will be at his table. Need I say how much God will be delighted to see his table furnished with guests? Hear his own invitation: hear how he pleads with you, and intreats you to accept it; hear how he expatiates on the delicacies he has provided for your repast^e. He sets before you nothing less than the body and blood of his dear Son; which Christ himself says, is "meat indeed, and drink indeed^f." Think of this, and let nothing for a moment delay your coming.]

2. Conform your invitations to his—

[We are enjoined to "be followers (imitators) of God as dear children:" "to be merciful as he is merciful, and perfect as he is perfect." Behold then at what expense he has made provision for our needy souls! "he has not spared even his own Son, but has delivered *him* up for us all." Let not us then grudge any sacrifice for the comfort and support of our afflicted brethren. Economy should be practised, in order to liberality; and self-denial, in order to an enlarging of our ability to supply the wants of others. You well "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich^g": Let the same mind be in you that was in him." Let the happiness of others be your happiness, and the luxury of doing good be your daily food. Thus will every thing you have be sanctified to you^h: and the blessing of God will rest upon you in lifeⁱ, in death^j, and to all eternity^k.]

^a Rev. xix. 7—9.

^c Isai. xxv. 6.

^d Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^e Isai. lv. 1, 2.

^f John vi. 55.

^g 2 Cor. viii. 6.

^h Luke xi. 41.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 10.

^j Ps. xli. 1.

^k Luke xvi. 9.

DCCLXXVI.

ANGELS REJOICE OVER PENITENTS.

Luke xv. 10. *I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

HOWEVER paradoxical the observation may appear, man is really an enemy to his own happiness. He loves sin, which is the source of all misery: and hates repentance, which is the only remedy for that misery. He cannot persuade himself that that which he professes to seek after, is to be found in penitence and self-denial. But, had we no other proof of the blessedness which attaches to true repentance, it were sufficient to know, upon the authority of Jesus Christ himself, that the very angels in heaven rejoice over any sinner in whom this good work is begun.

We will take occasion from our text to shew you,

I. What is that repentance which causes joy in heaven—

It is not every kind or degree of repentance that produces this effect: none but that which is effectual to the sinner's salvation, will excite these benevolent emotions in the breasts of angels. It consists in,

1. Sorrow for sin—

[This is absolutely necessary. If sin be not our burthen and grief, we have not the smallest spark of true repentance. There is a great difference indeed between the sorrow of the world, and that which is caused by a sense of sin: But in this there must be an agreement, that sin must lie as a heavy burthen upon the soul; and under a sense of it we must experience brokenness of heart and contrition: for it is "the broken and contrite heart, and that only, which God will not despise."]

2. Hatred of sin—

[Many will be sorry that they have brought themselves to shame and trouble, when they have no aversion to the sins which they have committed. Many also will hate sin in others, when they do not hate it in themselves. When David was totally unhumbled for his own enormous wickedness, he was so indignant against the man who was supposed to have taken the poor man's lamb, that he would have had him put to death for his offence. And Jehu was very zealous against the idolatry

of

of Ahab, while yet he was very indulgent to his own crimes. But if we are truly penitent, we shall hate our own sins more than any; and shall be disposed to seek their utter destruction, even though they be dear as a right hand, or a right eye. It will teach us to say with David, "I hate every false way."

3. A loathing of oneself on account of sin—

[Sin is a disorder that defiles and debases the whole soul. That is no exaggerated description of the Prophet, who says of us, that from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores. Now we may conceive in a measure, what loathing we should feel if we saw a person full of sores and ulcers: and such is the disgust which a view of our own souls should create within us. This is repeatedly mentioned as the experience of the Lord's people,^a even after that God is pacified towards them^a: and every one who really knows himself, will exclaim with Job, "Behold, I am vile, I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes^b."]

4. A fleeing to Christ from the guilt and power of sin—

[As long as we retain a hope of healing our own souls, we have not that "repentance which is unto life:" we evidently have low thoughts of sin, both of its guilt and power. We must be brought to an utter despair of washing away our sin by our tears, or of breaking its force by our resolutions. We must see that there is no hope for us but in the atoning blood of Christ, and in his all-sufficient grace: And we must rely simply on him, saying, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^c."]

The importance of this to man is obvious: but it is not so clear,

II. Why the angels take so deep an interest in it—

Whether the spirits of departed men have any knowledge of what passes in this world, may well be doubted: but it is certain that the angels are intimately connected with mankind, and take a lively interest in the things relating to them. They view the return of a penitent with peculiar delight;

1. Because it tends so greatly to the benefit of man—

[The angels cannot be apprised of the misery into which the

^a Ezek. xx. 43. & xvi. 63.

^b Job. xl. 4. & xlii. 6.

^c ai. xlv. 24.

the once happy, but now apostate, spirits are fallen: and they know that a participation of that misery is reserved for impenitent sinners. Whether they feel any pity towards a sinner in the midst of his rebellion, we cannot say: but we apprehend that they rather look upon him with holy indignation, and stand ready to execute any judgment that God may see fit to inflict upon him^d. But their benevolent hearts rejoice, if they see any one fleeing from the impending judgments, and setting his face in good earnest towards the heavenly kingdom. They congratulate him in their minds, and exult in the thought of having him to all eternity a partner of their joys.]

2. Because it opens fresh scope for the exercise of their own love—

[It is essential to benevolence to delight in opportunities of exerting itself for the benefit of the objects beloved. Now, as soon as ever a sinner repents and becomes an "heir of salvation, angels are sent forth to minister unto him." "They encamp round about him" for the purpose. If they behold him turning out of the path of duty, as Balaam; or lingering in a place of danger, as Lot; or in any respect likely to "dash his foot against a stone;" they will lend him their friendly aid in such a way as shall tend most to his eternal welfare. How they act upon us, we are not told: but of their agency there can be no doubt. It is highly probable that they are busily employed in counteracting the devices of those wicked spirits, who are ever seeking to destroy us. In a dying hour, we are sure they encompass the bed of a true penitent, and watch for the dismissal of his spirit from its house of clay, in order that they may bear it in triumph to the realms of bliss. Nor are their labours of love then terminated: for in the day of judgment they will gather together the saints, wheresoever they were scattered, in order to present them before the throne of their Judge, and expedite the final completion of their happiness. These offices being so congenial with their own feelings; they rejoice in every thing that affords them an opportunity to perform them.]

3. Because it brings the highest glory to God—

[The contemplation of the Divine glory is doubtless the highest source of their felicity. Now in the return of a penitent sinner they behold all the persons of the Godhead shining forth in the brightest splendor. They behold all the wisdom and power and grace of *the Father* glorified, whenever his eternal counsels respecting the salvation of a soul are accomplished. They behold the infinite virtue of the Son's atonement, when-

ever

^d Acts xii. 23.

ever the iniquities of a repenting prodigal are blotted out. They behold the wonderful "love of the Holy Spirit, and the invincible efficacy of his operations, when a creature, once bearing the impress of Satan himself, is transformed into the image of his God. When they had first a clear prospect of these things at the incarnation of our Lord, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest;" and every fresh manifestation of this mercy has filled them with additional and increasing joy.]

ADDRESS—

1. To the impenitent—

[Think what painful reflections your state suggests to those benevolent spirits; 'There are those infatuated people, laden with sins; on the brink of eternity; followed with overtures of mercy; assured that if they die in their present state they must perish for ever; and yet continuing impenitent! What a miracle of mercy it is that God does not instantly cut them down, and assign them the portion they deserve!' Think too how the evil angels are exulting over you; 'There they are; we have them fast in our chains; we shall soon have them as partners of our misery; then how shall we triumph over our God! Yes; the Father's counsels with respect to them will all be frustrated; the blood of Christ will have been shed in vain; the Spirit's operations will all have been successfully resisted: though we shall be in hell ourselves, we will enjoy our triumphs even there; for we shall have robbed man of his happiness, and God of his glory.' O Brethren, consider whether ye are willing to afford such a triumph to your bitterest enemy: and beg of Jesus, who is "exalted to give repentance and remission of sins," that he will bestow these blessings upon you.]

2. To the penitent—

[Let others deride or condemn your change, we will congratulate you upon it. The angels would feel no joy at your acquiring a large estate: No; if "a beggar were elevated from a dunghill to a throne," they would not account it worth one single thought. But if the poorest or vilest person in the universe repent, it fills them with unfeigned joy. They have not so much joy in the very presence of God, but it is capable of being augmented by such a sight as this. Nor is it a day of Pentecost alone that attracts their attention. Even a solitary instance of conversion is sufficient to exhilarate their souls. Go on then sowing in tears; and you shall ere long, in conjunction with the holy angels, reap a harvest of eternal joy.]

DCCLXXVII.

THE HOPELESS STATE OF THOSE WHO DISREGARD THE SCRIPTURES.

Luke xvi. 29—31. *Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*

IT is painful to reflect how men follow the footsteps of their forefathers, without ever seriously inquiring whither they tend. If we examine the records of those who have gone before us, we find that, for the most part, they lived to themselves, rather than unto God. "This their way was their folly; yet their posterity approve their saying;" and, like their predecessors, rush forward thoughtlessly to their own destruction. A very striking illustration of this is given us by one who was himself a spectator of the fact which he records^b. A flock of sheep, whilst going over a bridge, were frightened; and one of them jumped over the side of the bridge: the rest, imagining that he who led the way was safe and happy, followed in succession; and were all carried down a rapid river, and involved in one common, but unsuspected, ruin. Thus the different generations of men pass away; and each surviving race, concluding of course that those who went before are happy, follow the same fatal track, till it is too late to remedy their error.

The passage before us will illustrate this. It is part of a parable, wherein our Lord represents a rich man as living in luxurious indolence, till he is surprised by death, and made to feel the wrath of an avenging God. He had left his riches among five surviving brethren, who were all walking in his delusive steps, without ever once considering in what they would issue. The rich man, unable to prevail for even a drop of water to cool his tongue, requests, that if Lazarus may not be sent to *him* to mitigate his torment,

torment, he may be sent to his brethren to warn *them* of the danger in which *they* were, and to guard them against a continuance in their fatal security. But neither could this be granted: Abraham tells him, that they had the Scriptures in their hands; and that, if they would not attend to them, any message from the dead would be of no avail.

From this solemn declaration we shall take occasion to shew,

I. The use and office of the holy Scriptures—

This is plainly intimated in our text. The rich man had solicited that Lazarus might be sent to warn his brethren, lest they also should come into that place of torment. The reply was, That they had the Scriptures, and should attend to them: whence it appears that,

The use of the Scriptures is to guide men to heaven—

[They are intended to shew us the way thither, and to guard us against every erroneous path—— This they do with the utmost plainness and fidelity; insomuch that, if studied with diligence and prayer, they will assuredly “make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.”—— There certainly are passages in them difficult to be understood: but the great and essential truths are stated in so clear a manner, that he who runs may read them. Who that searches the Scriptures can doubt the issue of a carnal and worldly life? “To be carnally-minded is death.” Or who can doubt the acceptance of a sinner that humbles himself before God, and flees to Christ for refuge? Will it be found that any one was ever cast out, who came unto God through Christ? In a word, there is no instruction wanted, which is not contained in the Sacred Volume, and conveyed too in the most edifying manner. Its warnings are most solemn, its invitations most earnest, its expostulations most affectionate, its promises most enlarged—— If only we pay attention to them, we shall infallibly “be kept from the paths of the destroyer;” and have “our feet guided into the way of peace.”]

For this end they are fully sufficient—

[Nothing is wanting in *them*, God himself being witness—— The Old Testament writers and the New, alike declare the sufficiency of Scripture for every end that can be desired.

desired^d. — — — It is “ the rod of God’s strength, whereby he effects his work upon the souls of men, quickening the dead^e, sanctifying the unclean^f, comforting the afflicted^g, and saving the lost^h — — — And all that is wanting to render the word effectual, is to get it applied to our hearts by the Spirit of Godⁱ: when so applied, it becomes “ the power of God to the salvation of our souls^k.”]

It must be remembered, however, that whilst the Scriptures are so powerful to save those who use them aright, they declare most unequivocally,

II. The hopeless state of those who disregard them—

The rich man imagined, that, if some new method were used for the conversion of his brethren, it would be successful; but Abraham informed him, that, where the Scriptures were ineffectual, not even a messenger from the dead would be of any avail :

1. To convince the unbelieving—

[Though a messenger from the dead might be instrumental to awaken the attention of a person to the Scriptures, he could not convince him of any one truth contained in them. For what could he say that is not contained in the Scriptures ? He could only affirm, that the truth of what they declared, was now ascertained and felt by him, and placed beyond the reach of doubt. But this has been already declared by all the Inspired Writers, who in successive ages sealed the truth with their blood. Besides, the Scriptures corroborate their testimony by a thousand other proofs, which a person coming from the dead could not supply : and consequently, he who rejects the weightier evidence, would not be likely to be convinced by that which would be comparatively light. But the experiment has been made. Lazarus was raised from the dead : but many who saw him after his restoration to life, so far from being convinced by the miracle, sought to put him to death, lest a conviction should be wrought by it in the minds of others. Moreover, when our Lord rose from the dead, the soldiers, who guarded his tomb, went and announced it to the Jewish Rulers: but they, instead of being suitably impressed by it, and acknowledging the truth of Christ’s Messiahship, instantly fabricated a falsehood, and bribed the soldiers to attest it; and the soldiers actually accepted the bribe, and attested the falsehood, and joined in denying the truth of Christ’s

^d Ps. xix. 7—11. 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

^e Ps. cxix. 93. Jam. i. 18.

^f Ps. cvii. 20.

^g 1 Thess. i. 5.

^h John xv. 3. Eph. v. 26.

ⁱ Jam. i. 21.

^k Rom. i. 16

Christ's resurrection, even within an hour after they themselves had beheld it: so little power has any sight, however terrific or unquestionable, to convince a mind that is biassed by prejudice, and blinded by the devil.]

2. To court the impenitent—

[The sight of a person clothed with the splendor of heaven or the terrors of hell, would surprise and alarm; but it would never convert a soul. The same lusts that counteract the influence of the written word, would soon efface the impressions which any such spectacle might produce. The love of sin would still remain as strong as ever; and a desire to defer to a more convenient season that work, to which men are so radically averse. The effect of such a sight might be strong at the time; but it would gradually wear away; and probably ere long become a subject of derision. We know how frequently such declensions are found after a person has been alarmed by some awful providence or some awakening discourse: we know also how the Israelites "forgot the Lord at the Red Sea, *even at the Red Sea*:" and we are well assured, that they who can withstand the voice of God in his word, would equally withstand the voice of a fellow-creature, whether he should come down from heaven; or ascend from hell. Even if heaven and hell were opened to their view, the impression would be only transient; for, to convert a soul, is the work of God¹; and his power only can effect it^m.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. In what an awful condition are the *impenitent hearers* of the Gospel!

[Many hear the Gospel, and approve it, who yet are never truly converted by it; never stirred up to flee from the wrath to come, never quickened to lay hold on eternal life: religion never becomes the one business of their lives: they never engage in it as the voluptuary in his pleasures, or as the worldling in his pursuits: they may go on in a round of observances, but they want the life and power of godliness: their religion is destitute of zest, and earnestness, and uniformity — — — Now these persons withstand the most powerful engine which God himself employs for the conversion of the world. If they had never heard the sound of the Gospel, there might be hope that they would submit to it as soon as it should reach their ears; but they have heard it, and continue to resist its power, or to yield to it only a feigned and limited obedience. Let such persons consider the warning given them by St. James: for, whilst they are "hearers only,"

and .

¹ Eph. ii. 10.

^m 1 Cor. iii. 5—7. & v. 5.

and not doers, of the Law, they fearfully deceive their own souls: it is the doer of it only, that shall be blessed in his deeds". — — — Let us then examine what effects the Gospel produces upon us; let us see what conformity there is in our spirit and conduct to the examples of Christ and his Apostles: it is not by a mere outward morality that we must judge of ourselves, but by the spirituality of our minds, and the heavenliness of our lives. It is to *this*, that "Moses and the Prophets" invite us; and, if we "hear them" not to this end, we hear them altogether in vain.]

2. How inexcusable are they who will *not* hear the Gospel!

[Various are the grounds on which men slight the everlasting Gospel: some think it too early in life to pay any attention to it; others are too busy; others take up a prejudice against it; others are deterred by the fear of man. But what would *they* say to us, who are now fixed in their eternal state, if they were permitted to come and declare their minds? Would the blest inhabitant of heaven tell us, that his reward is too small a compensation for his labour, and that he regrets having paid so much attention to the concerns of his soul? Or would the wretched companion of devils and damned spirits represent his sufferings as unworthy to be regarded, and tell us that we need give ourselves no trouble to escape them? No: whether it should be the rich man from hell, or Lazarus from heaven, that should come to us, his testimony would be, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding." Beware therefore, Brethren, lest you suffer any thing to divert your attention from the Gospel of Christ. Be thankful that it is not yet too late for you to lift up your voice in prayer to God. Read the Scriptures, with prayer for the teachings of God's Spirit, and improve every opportunity of hearing them explained to you in public: they are given you as "a light shining in a dark place;" and it becomes you to "take heed to them" without delay°. With our Lord, therefore, I say, "Search the Scriptures;" or, in the words of our text, "You have Moses and the Prophets, HEAR THEM."]

3. What cause of thankfulness have they who *have* heard it with effect!

[This is a mercy to you from God, the richest mercy that God himself could bestow. It is God alone can "give us an understanding, that we may know him that is true:" and if he had not opened your understandings, you would still have been as blind as ever. Know then to whom you are indebted: and let it be the labour of your lives to

express

express a just sense of the obligations conferred upon you. But how shall you do this to the best purpose? I answer, Look around you, and see how many there are regardless of the Scriptures, and of the state to which they are hastening. Unhappy creatures! they have many friends or relatives that would gladly come from heaven or from hell to warn them: but no such intercourse can be allowed. They have the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament; and if they disregard these, no other means of salvation will be afforded them. But it is not prohibited to *living* saints to warn them: *you* may have access to them as often as you please, and even a more favourable access, than a disembodied spirit could have. To you they may listen without any terror or dismay. Improve then the opportunity that is afforded you. "Freely ye have received, freely give." It is not for yourselves only that God has given you light, it is for others also; that you may put it on a candlestick, and give light to all around you. You have some brethren or friends; go to them as an angel of light: and may God succeed your endeavours, to the salvation of many souls!]

DCCLXXVIII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH..

Luke xvii. 5, 6. *And the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say unto this sycamore-tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea, and it should obey you.*

THE Gospel is truly "a doctrine according to godliness:" its precepts are as much superior to Heathen morals, as its doctrines are to the Heathen Mythology. The forgiveness of injuries is required of the followers of Christ, to an extent that unassisted reason would have deemed neither practicable nor desirable. Our Lord told his Disciples, that they must not only forgive any occasional offence, but forgive it, however often it might be committed; provided the offender acknowledged his fault, and professed a determination to amend it. This seemed to them "an hard saying," and a requisition which far exceeded the powers of human nature to comply with: they therefore intreated him to "increase their faith." Now such a petition, so introduced, appears

appears absurd : but it was, in reality, most judicious. In proof of this we shall shew,

I. The reason of it—

At first sight we are ready to think that they should have prayed for an increase of *patience* or of *love* : since those graces appear far more intimately connected with the forgiveness of injuries than *faith* : but they were correct in their judgment, and right in their petition : for, respecting faith, it must be said,

1. It is the root of all acceptable obedience—

[We may perform works that shall *appear* good, though we have no faith ; but none that are *really* good : for, in order to be good and acceptable to God, they must flow from a principle of love to God ; they must also be performed with a readiness of mind, as to the Lord : and with an unfeigned desire that he may be glorified by them. But whence can we obtain this principle ? or how can we act in such a manner, or for such an end, if we have not been led by faith into a view of his glorious character, and to the knowledge of the obligations we owe him in Christ Jesus ? We might as well expect to find fruit on a tree that has no root, as such actions without an humble and lively faith. Our Lord himself tells us, that “without him,” that is, without an union with him by faith, “we can do nothing :” and St. Paul tells us, that without faith it is impossible to please God. The Thirteenth Article of our Church also confirms the same in the most express terms. Indeed all holy actions and affections are called, “the fruits of the Spirit :” but it is by faith only that we obtain the Spirit : consequently, they must all be traced to faith, as the proper root from whence they spring.]

2. It is particularly influential in the production of a forgiving Spirit—

[Till we know what we ourselves merit before God, and what mercy is offered to us in the Gospel of his Son, we shall be disposed to resent an injury that is done to us : at least, if we abstain from any vindictive acts, we shall feel an inward corroding of spirit, when the remembrance of the injury occurs to our minds. But let a person have a just view of redeeming love, and it will soon calm all his angry passions : when pained with the recollection of the evil treatment he has received, he will call to mind his own conduct towards God : when disposed to complain of others, he will think what reason he has given to God to complain of him : and when called upon to exercise forgiveness, he will bear in mind what mercy he himself has exercised at the hands of God.

This,

This, I say, is the necessary fruit of faith: for, "having been forgiven ten thousand talents, can he take a fellow-creature by the throat for a few pence*?" No: "having been forgiven much, he will love much."]

Having on these grounds presented to their Lord a petition for an increase of faith, he approved of their petition, and proceeded instantly to mark,

II. The importance of it—

Two things he intimates to them;

1. That faith was an irresistible principle—

[What could convey an idea of difficulty more than the plucking up of a sycamore-tree by the roots, and planting it stedfastly in the tempestuous ocean? yet our Lord told them, that faith would be able to effect even that; and, consequently, it could pluck up by the roots their most inveterate resentments, and establish their minds even in the midst of the most tumultuous scenes. Accordingly we find that faith has done all these things^b: and what it has done for others, it can, and shall, do for us. Indeed, it brings, if we may so express ourselves, a kind of omnipotence into the soul, inasmuch as it interests Omnipotence in our behalf: and God himself says concerning it, "All things are possible to him that believeth." Nor is this true only of faith in its most enlarged measure, and its strongest exercises: if it exist only in a small measure, it shall operate nevertheless to the production of the greatest good. Doubtless its effects will be proportioned to the measure of its existence in the soul: but still its operation will be exceeding powerful, even though it be small "as a grain of mustard-seed:" for the weakest faith, if genuine, unites us to Christ, and makes us partakers of all his fulness, even as the branch of a vine participates all the virtue of the stock and root. Moreover the smallest faith brings the Holy Spirit into the soul, and secures to us his almighty operations as far as they shall be necessary for our welfare. It also interests us in all the Promises; every one of which shall be fulfilled to us in their season. Though therefore strong faith will bring more glory to God, the weakest faith shall ultimately prevail to the saving of our souls.]

2. That they had done well in asking it at his hands—

[Our Lord did not decline the honour which they offered him. On many occasions they had asked of him what none but God could bestow: and, had he not been God, as well

* Matt. xviii. 32, 33.

^b Heb. xi. throughout.

well as man, he would have rectified their error, and taught them to pray only and exclusively to his heavenly Father. When John mistook an angel for the Deity, and “fell at his feet to worship him, the angel forbade him, saying, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant: worship God^c.” So our Lord himself, when a certain lawyer, who conceived of him only as a man, gave him a title due only to God, reproved him, saying, “Why callest thou me *good*? there is none good but One, that is God.” But here he so commended the subject of their petition as manifestly to intimate his approbation of the petition itself. In like manner, when Paul, some years afterwards, prayed to him for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, Jesus answered him, “My grace is sufficient for thee^d,” thereby leaving no room for doubt but that we may address our prayers to him, and that “he will fulfil all our petitions.” “Do we then need faith; or, possessing it already in a small degree, do we need to have it strengthened and increased?” let us remember, that “whatsoever we shall ask of him, or of the Father in his name, that will HE do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son^e.” He has “all fulness treasured up in him;” yea, “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily:” and “out of his fulness shall we all receive, even grace for grace.” As repentance is his gift^f, so is faith also his gift^g: wherever it exists, it is He who has wrought it in the heart^h; for he is both “the Author and the Finisher of itⁱ.” Let us then from day to day present to him the petition in our text, “Lord, increase our faith.”]

Now from this subject we may clearly LEARN,

1. The true order of Christian duties—

[The Apostles asked for faith in order to produce in them a suitable practice: and this is what we also must do: we must not set ourselves, as many ignorantly do, first to perform good works, in order that they may serve as a *warrant* for believing in Christ: but we must believe in him, in order that we may be enabled to perform good works to his honour and glory. This may appear an unnecessary distinction; but it is of infinite importance: it lies at the very foundation of all our hopes, and of all our comforts. If we attempt to reverse this order, we shall be like persons who should prepare a superstructure without laying a foundation, or expect fruit from a tree that had no root. The Scripture is very express on this subject: we must lay hold on the Promises first, and then make use of them for the purifying of

^c Rev. xix. 10.

^f Acts v. 31.

^h Col. ii. 12.

^d 2 Cor. xii. 8—10.

^g Acts xviii. 27. Eph. ii. 8. Phil. i. 27.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 2.

^e John xiv. 13.

of our souls^k: we must first behold the glory of the Lord in the Gospel, and then by virtue of that sight be changed into his image^l.]

2. The proper tendency of faith—

[Why did the Apostles ask for faith? Was it to *set aside* the duties that had been just inculcated? No: it was, that they might be able to practise them. Perverse people will, though instructed to the contrary ten thousand times, represent the duty of faith as having a licentious tendency: but look into the Scriptures, and see how it wrought on the saints of old: or look to the fruits that are uniformly ascribed to it in the Scriptures: Is it not “by faith that we overcome the world?” Is it not also represented as “working by love” and “purifying the heart?” Perhaps it may be thought to *bring us to* duties in the first instance, and to *set us above* them afterwards: but behold its operation in its more advanced state; and hear what St. Paul says of the Thessalonian Church; “We are bound to thank God always for you, Brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and (what? you therefore are above attending to good works? No: but) the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth^m.” Know then, that the prejudice which so generally obtains both against the grace and the doctrine of faith, is without any just foundation: and that, though a counterfeit grace will produce only a semblance of fruit, a living faith will uniformly operate to the production of good works.]

3. The folly of calling ourselves Believers, whilst we exercise an unforgiving spirit—

[It must be confessed, that many will pretend to faith, who yet indulge very unhallowed dispositions: they are proud, and wrathful, and vindictive; if not to the same extent as others, yet sufficiently to shew that they are yet unsanctified and unrenewed. And what shall we say to such persons? Shall we encourage them to think that these tempers are to be regarded only as the infirmities of saints? No, in truth: “they are not the spots of God’s children,” but the proper character of the Devil’s. The criterion given of his people is universal and infallible; “By their fruits ye shall know them: a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, nor a good tree bad fruit:” therefore our Lord repeats the admonition, “By their fruits ye shall know themⁿ.” Excuse not then yourselves, ye morose, quarrelsome, fretful, unforgiving people; for ye are trees that shall be “cut down and cast into the

^k 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^m 2 Thess. i. 3.

^l 2 Cor. iii. 18.

ⁿ Matt. vii. 16—20.

the fire^o:" ye are "trees, whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever^p." Talk not of grace: for grace, that is not effectual, is no grace; and faith, that produces not holy tempers, is no better than the faith of devils^q. If you complain, that you cannot overcome your tempers; I would say, Set about it in the right way. You make resolutions perhaps; and break them as soon as made: but go rather and exercise faith on God, and on his great and precious promises: go and contemplate the incomprehensible love of Christ in dying for you: go and sprinkle his blood upon your conscience, and get a sense of his pardoning love upon your soul: Go, I say, and get your faith increased, and exercised; and you shall no longer have to complain of want of power to do the will of God: let him "perfect that which is lacking in your faith;" and you will then be enabled to perfect that which is lacking in your practice: "through him strengthening you, you will be able to do all things."]

^o Matt. vii. 16—20.

^p Jude 12, 13.

^q Jam. ii. 19, 20. with 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

^r Tit. iii. 8.

DCCLXXIX.

SUDDENNESS OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

Luke xvii. 26—30. *As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man: they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also, as it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all: even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*

WE cannot be too often reminded, that Religion is not a matter of speculation, but of practice. The replies which our Lord constantly made to speculative or curious inquiries, leads us to this remark. He always endeavoured to turn the mind inwards, and to make every question that was put to him, subservient to the spiritual welfare of his hearers. The Pharisees, ever deceiving themselves with the expectation of a temporal Messiah, asked him, "When the kingdom

kingdom

kingdom of God should come?" He told them, that the Messiah's kingdom was not to be an *outward* and *temporal* one, such as they looked for, but an *inward* and *spiritual* kingdom, such as he himself was now establishing in the hearts of men. But as the nation at large would reject him, he warned his hearers, that the Son of Man should again come, even before that present generation should have passed away; that, when he did come, he would find them as supine and careless as they were at that moment; and that, unless they repented, his coming would issue in their utter destruction.

This seems to be the obvious import of the words. But, as the same expressions are used in a subsequent discourse, where they are blended with others relating to the day of judgment, we shall not confine them to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, but take them as declaring in general,

I. The state of mankind at large—

We are here told what was their state in the days of old—

[In the days of Noah and of Lot the great mass of mankind were in a state of *carnal enjoyment*, of *criminal security*, and of *contemptuous unbelief*.

Their business and their pleasures altogether engrossed their minds: 'they ate and drank, and formed connexions, and got fortunes, and built houses, and planted grounds, and consulted their own happiness and comfort in the way they liked best.' This was their entire employment, and the great object of their lives: if they could but make themselves happy and comfortable in their respective stations, it was all they cared for.

Had they pursued these things in subserviency to higher and better things, there would have been no blame imputed to them: for, the eating, and drinking, and marrying, and buying, and selling, and planting, and building, were not wrong in themselves: but the evil of this state consisted in its being their chief, if not their only, occupation. Had we been told, that, in addition to these things, they wept, they fasted, they prayed, they turned to God, and served the Lord with their whole hearts, we should not have grudged them one atom of their enjoyments, or have thought the worse of them for their worldly occupations. But God was not in all their thoughts; eternity was hid from their view; the

the things of time and sense engaged their whole attention: they took for granted that they had nothing to fear from the hands of God, and therefore they were under no anxiety to obtain his favour. In a word, they regarded their bodily welfare, but had no concern at all about their souls.

But this security of theirs did not proceed from ignorance: the Antediluvians were taught by Noah, for one hundred and twenty years together, that God would punish their supineness, that he would punish it too by a deluge that should overwhelm the whole earth. Moreover, the ark was gradually prepared in their sight; so that at least they must see that the Preacher believed his own declarations. In like manner, the inhabitants of Sodom were warned by Lot, who "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." But, as Noah was doubtless regarded as little better than a maniac, so, Lot's words, we are told, appeared, even to his own relatives as idle tales; "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." This it was that chiefly aggravated the guilt of the persons referred to: they were called, but they would not answer; they were warned, but they would not hear: they cast God's words behind them, and set at nought all his threatenings, and poured contempt upon all his messages of love and mercy. Such was their state in the days of old.]

And similar to it will be the state of the world at the last day—

[Should we attempt to describe the state of the world at this hour, where could we find words more proper to represent it than those in the text? We may appeal to all, whether the great mass of Christians, no less than of Heathens, be not divided between the two pursuits of business and pleasure? Into how many companies may you go, before you will find a person that seriously inquires, "Where is God my Maker?" We might here speak of the open sins which are every where committed without shame and without remorse: but we purposely omit the mention of any gross sin whatever, and confine ourselves to the things specified in our text as characterizing the most inoffensive part of the Antediluvian world, and of the inhabitants of Sodom; because it is to the more inoffensive part of the community that we now more especially address ourselves: and we ask whether the text, be not a faithful picture of them. In particular, Is not serious religion held up to scorn? and are not the promoters of it considered as "the troublers of Israel?" Blessed be God, the ark is rearing in the midst of you; and there are a few who boldly protest against the impiety that prevails: but how few improve the warnings that they hear, or set themselves in earnest to flee from the wrath to come!

Nor

Nor is this picture less descriptive of those who will be alive at the day of judgment. The same carnal enjoyments will be sought then as now; the same criminal security will obtain; and the same contemptuous unbelief will decry all need of vital godliness. The people of that generation will be warned, even as you have been; and they will regard the messages of God as the dreams of gloomy superstition, or the reveries of enthusiastic folly. This state of things will continue even to the very moment that Christ shall come to judgment, precisely as it did among the Antediluvians, till the flood came, and, among the inhabitants of Sodom, till the fire came down from heaven to consume them.]

This melancholy prospect renders it necessary for me to point out,

II. The danger of that state—

We have before observed, that the text primarily refers to the coming of Christ to destroy Jerusalem, but has a further reference also to his coming to judge the world. Agreeably to this view of it, shall be our consideration of the danger that attends the state therein described.

Consider then its danger,

1. To the nation—

[There is a time when Christ comes to punish nations, just as he did to punish Jerusalem. And how shall we judge of the time that he will come? I answer, *Then* is he most likely to come, when a nation is in the state before described. That he is visiting the nations now, is a fact so clear, that no thoughtful man can entertain a doubt of it. Hitherto the showers of his wrath, which have deluged other lands, have but just sprinkled ours: but the clouds are black, and gathering thick around us: and the darkest symptom is, that, “though his hand is lifted up, we will not see it.” Consult the Scriptures, and see whether this security be not the surest forerunner of his judgments? See what was the state of Jerusalem previous to the Babylonish captivity, and say whether, whilst our state so precisely accords with it, we have not reason to tremble at the prospect of her judgments^a? or let the predicted fall of the mystical Babylon be taken as a ground of your decision^b. The truth is, that, amidst all the advantages which we possess for superior piety, we take the lead in an idolatrous attachment to wealth and pleasure, and in a presumptuous confidence in an arm of flesh: we may well there-
fore

^a Isai. xlvii. 8—11.

^b Rev. xviii. 7, 8.

fore expect, that the cup which others have drunk of, shall be put into our hands^c; and that our superior guilt will issue in more aggravated calamities^d.]

2. To individuals—

[The Lord Jesus may not in any signal manner visit men in this life; but he will infallibly call them to judgment in the world to come. For this end he will come to them, as soon as they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities; and the same criterion which we have used in estimating the ripeness of *nations* for judgment, will serve us to judge of the state of individuals. God has told us, that “as fishes are taken in an evil net, and as birds are caught in a snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them^e.” Moreover, to impress this the more strongly on our minds, he has represented a man, who, having succeeded in his temporal pursuits, congratulates himself on the prospect of many years of pleasurable enjoyment: and then he addresses that man in terms suited to the occasion; “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee^f.” Here then we see a lively example of the state which is described in our text, and of the visit which the sinner receives from his offended Lord. May this awful representation never be realized in us! But let us tremble lest it should: for we are taught to expect, that “our Lord will come in a time that we look not for him, and at an hour that we are not aware^g.” nay more, we are assured, that, when we begin to say, “I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of my heart, *then* will God’s anger and jealousy smoke against us, and he will blot out our name from under heaven^h.”]

3. To the world at large—

[The precise season of the general judgment is not known to men or angels; nor was Christ himself, as man, informed of it, at least not so informed as to have it within his commission to declare it. But we have already seen in what state the world will be at its arrival. They will be expecting the period as little as we at present are. They will have been warned respecting it by the faithful Ministers of Christ; but they will not regard the admonitions that are given them: they will rather scoff, as the Antediluvians and the inhabitants of Sodom did, “Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creationⁱ.” But, in the midst of all their occupations, enjoyments, projects, the trumpet shall sound, and the Judge appear in his glory. This will take place

^a Jer. xxv. 15, 28, 29.

^b Eccl. ix. 12.

^c Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

^d Amos vi. 3—6. & Isai. xxii. 12—14.

^e Luke xii. 45, 46.

^f Lukexii. 19, 20.

^g 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye^k." "As the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be!" Alas! in what a condition will millions of the human race be found! some in the commission of the grossest crimes; some ridiculing the supposed weakness of their faithful Monitors; and the more innocent among them occupied in nothing better than "eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage." How terrible to be called to judgment in a state so unprepared! Will the suddenness of the event be any excuse for them in that day? or will it be any reason for averting or mitigating their punishment? No: it will be with them as with those mentioned in our text: "As soon as Noah entered into the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all;" and, "as soon as Lot went out of Sodom, the fire and brimstone descended and consumed them all:" so will all, that are unprepared to meet their God, be utterly and eternally destroyed. Hence the day of judgment is called, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men^m." As long as we are in this world, it is "a day of acceptance, a day of salvationⁿ." Yes, even to the eleventh hour we are warranted to invite men to return to God, and to assure them of a favourable reception: but when death or judgment arrive, there is an end of the day of grace, and then commences the day of everlasting perdition.]

ADDRESS,

1. The congregation in general—

[We would intreat every one of you to inquire, whether you are prepared to meet your God? This is no trifling question; no enthusiastic question, no party question; it is a question in which all are equally interested, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned. And we beg leave to remind you all, that an inoffensive conduct is not sufficient to secure happiness for you in the last day. You will observe, that no gross sin is imputed to the Antediluvian world, or to the inhabitants of Sodom; many of them doubtless were guilty of heinous transgressions: but the universal sin, the sin that destroyed them *all*, was carelessness. Say then, Brethren, whether this do not characterize your state? and whether you have not reason to tremble for the judgments that shall come upon you? You are apt to promise yourselves a more convenient season for turning to God: but how many are disappointed in that hope! Suppose that,

^k 1 Cor. xv. 52.

^l ver. 24.

^m 2 Pet. ii. 7. The Greek,

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

that, at the Deluge, there were some so far wrought upon by the Ministry of Noah, that they determined to follow his advice as soon as they should have finished their present business, and got more time for spiritual employments: suppose them surprised by the flood, witnessing the destruction thousands around them, and, from an eminence to which they had fled, seeing the ark borne up by the waves in which they were shortly to be immersed; how would they wish that they had improved the day of their visitation, and fled to the ark for refuge! Thus pungent, thus fruitless, will be the remorse of millions in the day of judgment. But, blessed be God! the ark is not yet closed: it is open for all who will flee unto it: the Lord Jesus Christ never did, nor ever will, close the door against a repenting sinner: he came to seek and to save the lost; yea, he shed his blood upon the cross to save them. To all of you then would we say, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut the door about thee, and hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." But, if you will not hear, know of a certainty; that "your judgment lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not:" for, "if God spared not the angels that sinned . . . nor the old world . . . nor Sodom; but saved Noah . . . and delivered Lot, he knows at this time how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished¹."

2. Those amongst you who make a profession of vital godliness—

[This subject may appear to some of you to be calculated to awaken sinners, but not very well suited to the edification of saints. This conceit appears to have entered into the mind of Christ's Disciples; and to have been justly reprov'd by him; for, who is he that needs not such an admonition? We grant, that here are no new truths brought to our view: "you know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night;" and that when men shall say, 'Peace and safety,' then destruction shall come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. Ye, Brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness." But is this subject therefore uninstruc-tive to you? Hear how the Apostle continues his address to the very persons whom he has thus described: "Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober: let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and, for
an

^o Isai. xxvi. 20.

^r Matt. xxiv. 44—46.

^p 2 Pet. ii. 3.

¹ 1 Thess. v. 2—5.

^q ib, ver. 4—9.

an helmet, the hope of salvation." Hear also how another Apostle addresses the whole Christian Church: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night . . . Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God? . . . Wherefore, Beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless." As we said to others, that an inoffensive conduct will not suffice; so we must say to you, that a religious profession will not suffice. You know full well in what a state men ought to *die*; (how penitent, how believing, how devout in their minds, how subdued in their tempers, how superior to the world, how intent on heavenly things:) this then is the state in which you ought to *live*: that, when Jesus shall say to you, "Surely I come quickly;" you may be ready at all times to answer, "Even so; come, Lord Jesus!"

† 1 Thess. v. 6—8.

* 2 Pet. iii. 10—14.

* Rev. xxii. 20.

DCCLXXX.

LOT'S WIFE.

Luke xvii. 32. *Remember Lot's Wife.*

IT is necessary for mariners frequently to consult charts or maps, which have been formed for the purpose of pointing out to them the different bearings of different countries, and of guarding them against latent obstacles which would endanger the safety of their ship. But notwithstanding the utmost care that has been taken to ascertain the situation of rocks and shoals, it often happens that ships are wrecked, where no caution has been given in the most approved charts, and where no danger was apprehended. This however cannot happen to persons sailing for the port of heaven. There is not a rock or shoal that is not plainly laid down in the Inspired Volume; nor is there any fear of shipwreck to those who will follow the course which is there prescribed. That multitudes do perish, notwithstanding they have that Volume before them, is certain. Many who have for a long time enjoyed, like Demas, a prosperous voyage,

voyage, have yet, through their inattention to the cautions given them, struck upon the rocks of worldliness, and come short of the desired harbour. But the fault is in themselves only; they have been guarded in a peculiar manner against the danger to which they were exposed: it had been said to them, and it is said to us also, "Remember Lot's wife." But let us inquire,

I. What we are to remember concerning her,

We may comprehend the whole under two heads:

1. Her sin—

[She, as the history informs us, looked back towards Sodom after she had been delivered from it by the angels^a.

Is it asked, What harm there was in this? we answer, It was in many points of view exceeding sinful. *It was (to speak of it in the most favourable light) a *curious* look. Curiosity may indeed be innocent in reference to some things; but in reference to others, it may be highly criminal. Who can doubt the criminality of those Bethshemites who looked into the ark; when above fifty thousand of them were struck dead upon the spot for their transgression^b? Or who that knows any thing of his own heart, can doubt, whether he has not often contracted guilt by indulging an unhallowed curiosity to see, or hear, or read, things which he had no proper call to inquire into, and the knowledge of which tended only to enflame his imagination, and defile his soul? And surely the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was not a fit subject for curiosity, at a time too that she was rescued from it by the ministry of angels: her mind ought to have been very differently occupied on so awful an occasion.

But it was also an *unbelieving* look. She had been told that fire and brimstone should come down from heaven to destroy those wicked cities; and she was desirous to know whether the threatening were indeed true, or whether she was fleeing from only imaginary dangers. And was this no sin? Was not Sarah reproved for doubting an almost incredible promise^c? Was not Zacharias struck deaf and dumb for a similar fault^d? Yea, were not all the nation of Israel doomed to perish in the Wilderness on account of their unbelief^e? Who then will say, What harm was there in her conduct?

Moreover, it was a *wishful* look. She had left a part of her family behind, together with (what she seemed more anxious about) the whole of her possessions; and, instead of being thankful

^a Gen. xix. 26.

^b 1 Sam. vi. 19.

^c Gen. xviii. 12, 13.

^d Luke i. 18, 20.

^e Heb. iii. 18, 19.

thankful for the preservation of her life, she was filled with regret about what she had lost. That this was a very essential part of her fault, is certain; because she is proposed as a warning to us in this particular view^f. Her treasure was more in Sodom than in heaven; and she shewed by her look, that "where her treasure was, there was her heart also." Was there then no crime in "setting her affections on things below, instead of on things above?"

Lastly, it was a *disobedient* look. However innocent it might be in every other view, it was palpably wrong in this. The command was plain and positive; "Look not behind thee in all the plain." It was not for her to determine whether the command were more or less important; her duty was to obey it: and, in violating it, she rebelled against the Majesty of heaven. Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit might be thought a slight offence; but it ruined the whole world. And Saul's sparing of Agag and the spoil, might be called a merciful and commendable deviation from the commission given him; but it was declared to be rebellion against God, and as criminal in his estimation as witchcraft or idolatry^g.

In remembering therefore her *sin*, we should remember, that God looks not merely on our outward conduct, but at the inward principles and dispositions of the heart.]

2. Her punishment—

[This was truly *awful*. She was instantly involved in the very same ruin that overwhelmed all the cities of the plain. Not a moment was allowed her for repentance; but she was cut off in the very act of sin, and summoned into the presence of her Judge to receive her doom at his hands — — —

It was moreover *exemplary*. She was made a monument of God's holy indignation, and a warning to all future ages, that men must not trifle with sin, or be inattentive to the Divine commands. Wherever the Bible shall come, even to the very end of time, she will be held up as an example of that vengeance, which shall sooner or later overtake all whose hearts are at variance with their professions.]

It will be proper to state,

II. Why we are to bear her in remembrance—

Much there is that we may learn from her; but particularly,

1. Our duty—

[That we are not to be altogether "of the world," is a truth that scarcely need be mentioned to those who make any profession of religion. But very few are aware to what an

^f ver. 31.

^g 1 Sam. xv. 22, 23.

extent our renunciation of it should be carried. It is not sufficient, that we do not run to the same excess of riot with the ungodly; or that we differ from them in appearance and profession: we must indeed have some intercourse with them (or else we could not fill up our several stations in life); but we must "come out from among them and be separate, and have no more communion with them than light with darkness, or Christ with Belial^b." Nor must we have our heart set upon our property, when God in his providence is calling us to forsake it. We need not put away riches from us, if God is pleased to cast them into our lap; nor ought we to be indifferent to the preservation of them; if we can keep them together with our integrity: but they are not to be our idol; nor ought we to regret the loss of them, if we be called to sacrifice them for the honour of our God. We should have our affections withdrawn from things below, and set exclusively on things above. We should, "love nothing that is in the world," so as to judge it at all necessary to our happiness: instead of wishing to accumulate possessions in it, or to enjoy its vanities, it should be our principal care to shun its pollutions, and escape its plagues^c. If we look back upon it at all, it must only be for the purpose of kindling in our hearts a more lively gratitude to God, who in infinite mercy has delivered us from it, and plucked us out of it as brands out of the burning.]

2. Our danger—

[Let not any one imagine himself safe, because he is come out of Sodom, and is associated with those who are fleeing from the wrath to come. We know that the Scripture does give many blessed assurances of the Divine protection to those who trust in God: but it is a very sinful perversion of the Scriptures to interpret them in such a manner, as to invalidate all the solemn cautions which are given against apostatizing from our profession, and falling short of the promised rest. We are in danger^d: and our security principally consists in feeling our danger, and in acting conformably to those sensations. For what end are we so frequently reminded of the destruction of the Israelites after they had been brought out of Egypt, and after they had been favoured with God's visible presence in the wilderness^e? or why did our Lord so strongly recommend us to "remember Lot's wife;" and tell us, that "no man, who having put his hand to the plough should look back, was fit for the kingdom of God?" or where is the man, however confident he may be about the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, who will venture to say, that he himself

^b 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

^c Rev. xviii. 4.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 18, 20. & iii. 17.

^e Jude, 5. 1 Cor. x. 1—6, 11, 12.

himself is in no danger of "looking back," and that he is already so "escaped from the pollutions of the world, that he never *can* be entangled again with them and overcome?" I say again, we are in danger, all of us; and it becomes us "not to be high-minded, but to fear."—"Let him therefore that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."]

In CONCLUSION, we would suggest a few hints respecting *the manner* in which you should obey the admonition in the text. Remember her,

1. With *thanksgivings* to God, that you have not long since experienced a similar judgment———
2. With prayer to God, that he would "keep you by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation"———

DCCLXXXI.

CHRIST FORETELLS HIS OWN SUFFERINGS.

Luke xviii. 21—34. *Then he took unto him the Twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things that were spoken.*

WE are informed respecting some of the Heathen Philosophers, that they had a doctrine for the vulgar, and a different doctrine for their own immediate disciples. Not so our blessed Lord; he had the same doctrine for all: but he communicated some things more plainly to his select followers, because they had, by reason of their constant attendance upon him, a clearer conception of his meaning, and because they were afterwards to become the Instructors of the world. Hence we find that he explained to them in private what he had spoken to the public in parables: and in these private, no less than in his public, instructions, he was indefatigable; embracing every opportunity, whether when sitting in the house, or when

when walking by the way. He was now walking with his Disciples towards Jerusalem; and, as his death was speedily approaching, he judged it right to apprise them what they were to expect. He knew how great a stumbling-block his sufferings were likely to prove to those who did not understand the reason and necessity of them; and therefore he determined once more to inform them, that the sufferings were not unexpected casualties, but events foreseen by him and fore-ordained by God.

In this passage there are two things to be noticed ;

I. The minuteness of our Lord's prophecy—

We can scarcely conceive a prophecy to be more circumstantial than that before us: and in this view it reflects peculiar light on,

1. His character as a man—

[The particular sufferings here specified are most terrible to flesh and blood: yet behold, he speaks of them with as much composure as if they were light and insignificant. But in regarding them with such indifference, he shewed how undaunted was his *fortitude*, how ardent his *zeal*, how unquenchable his *love*. Previous to his specifying these things, when he did but manifest a readiness to go up to Jerusalem, where the Jews of late had sought to stone him, his Disciples were amazed at his intrepidity, and trembled for themselves lest they also should be involved in difficulties through him*: and, if they were so agitated with a *confused* apprehension of *probable* evils, how great must his resolution have been, who saw every trouble *distinct* and *certain*, and yet went forward boldly to meet it all! But he had undertaken to glorify his Father upon earth, and to open a way for the display of all his perfections in the salvation of fallen man; and he would not go back: yea, foreseeing what "a bloody baptism he had to be baptized with, he was quite straitened till it should be accomplished." The only alternative was, to bear the sins of men in his own body, or to leave them to perish under the wrath of God: and though he knew how dreadful that wrath was, and that, if not borne by him as their surety, they must bear it for ever, he went forward a willing sacrifice, and "gave himself up for us an offering to God of a sweet-smelling savour." These heavenly virtues, I say, are all heightened by the consideration, that he had a distinct view of the indig-

* Compare John xi. 7, 8, 16, 37. with Mark x. 32. He "*went before*:" they "*amazed, and afraid*."

nities that were to be offered to him, and the miseries that he was to endure; and his prophetic enumeration of them discovers and illustrates the unrivalled excellencies of his character.]

2. His office as the Messiah—

[What clearer proof could be given of his Messiahship? Two questions I would put to any one that doubts the Messiahship of Jesus; and I will defy all the infidels upon earth to answer them: “*Could any impostor foresee such events? or, Would any impostor rest his pretensions on the accomplishment of them?*” We may conceive an impostor to foresee, that he shall be treated with much indignity, and that he shall be put to death: I say, he may see so great a probability of these things, as that he shall venture to predict them: but the circumstances foretold by our Lord are beyond the sphere of probability. Compare the account of this prophecy as it is related in the text, and by St. Matthew^b: Jesus foretells that he was to be betrayed, and “delivered up into the hands of the Chief Priests and Scribes;” that he was to undergo the formality of a trial, and “be condemned” by a judicial sentence: that he should then not be put to death by them, but “be delivered unto the Gentiles,” and by them be mocked, and spitefully intreated, and spit on: that by them also he should be scourged; and after that should “be crucified” as a slave. Now the probability was, that he would be tumultuously stoned to death by the Jews; because that was the punishment annexed to the crime of which they accused him, namely, blasphemy, and because they had repeatedly attempted to stone him before. As for the Jews delivering him up to the Romans, particularly after the Roman Governor had given them leave to “take and judge him according to their law,” it was highly improbable, considering how jealous the Jews were of the Roman power, and how much they hated it. But supposing him delivered up to the Romans, what reason was there to think that he should be insulted by *them*, and in the *precise manner* which he described? But why should they “scourge” him? or, if he must be scourged, why must he be put to death, and *that* too the death of a slave? No other persons were scourged and crucified too: and the fact is, that Pilate ordered him to be scourged in order to *prevent* his crucifixion: he hoped, that the Jews, when they saw how severely he had been scourged, would have been satisfied to let him go: and it was nothing but a most singular concurrence of most implacable enmity on their part, and most shameful cowardice on his, that produced the accomplishment of the whole prophecy. I ask then again, “*Could any impostor foresee such events?*”

^b Matt. xx. 18, 19.

events?" or rather, must not he who did foresee them be endowed with a divine prescience, that proved him incontestably to have been sent from God?

But supposing for argument-sake that an impostor might guess at these things, and venture to predict them; would any impostor rest his pretensions on the accomplishment of such events as these? Though he might foretell many indignities to be offered him, would he predict his death, and so cruel a death as that of the cross, when he would thereby be precluded from reaping any benefit from his imposture, and be hurried into the eternal world to answer for his deceit at the tribunal of his God? Would any man in his senses act such a part as this? But if we could suppose it possible that a man should be so under the influence of vanity, as to sacrifice his present and eternal welfare for the purpose of leaving a name behind him, and being followed by survivors as a founder of a sect, would he be mad enough to give out, as our Lord did, that he "would rise again the third day?" Would he fix on a test which in so short a time should prove his imposture, and expose him to the scorn and derision of the whole world? They who can believe that any impostor would do this, have no cause to complain of any thing incredible in the Sacred Oracles; for all the difficulties that can be found in the whole scheme of Christianity, are nothing in comparison of this, no, not worthy of a thought.

Besides, our blessed Lord speaks of "all these things as written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man;" so that *they* also, living at the distance of many hundred years from him, and from each other, must have been confederate with him, if he was an impostor: but, if this could not be, then does this circumstantial prediction of his sufferings and resurrection, accomplished as it was in every minute particular, prove beyond a doubt, that he was the true Messiah.]

Let us now proceed to notice,

II. The dulness of his Disciples in comprehending it—

Nothing could be plainer than his words: there are no figures, no metaphors, no parabolical expressions; all is clear, plain, literal, explicit. Whence then was it that the Disciples could "not understand these things; that this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken!" The truth is, they were blinded,

1. By their prejudice—

[They had, in common with their nation at large, formed a notion that the Messiah was to be a temporal Prince, and

not only to liberate them from the Roman yoke, but to establish an universal empire upon earth: and as the things which Jesus predicted, were altogether irreconcilable with those ideas, they could not at all receive his word, or comprehend his meaning: He had often repeated the same truths to them: but still they could not understand him. Now it is owing to this cause that the Gospel is so little understood at this day. Men have formed pre-conceived notions of religion; and, because they do not find them confirmed by the Sacred Writers, they cannot receive even the plainest declarations of God himself. The current idea of religion is, that 'we are imperfect creatures, needing some amendment; yet, provided we are not grossly immoral, we have nothing to fear: if we are sober and honest, and just and charitable, and approve ourselves good members of society, God will readily pardon our little imperfections; and whatever is wanting to recommend us to his favour, Jesus Christ will supply.' These are the views almost universally adopted, and the sentiments that are maintained, wherever religion is made the subject of conversation. Now when persons, possessed of these ideas, hear that we are altogether corrupt and abominable, and justly exposed to the curse and wrath of God for our innumerable violations of his law, they cannot tell what we mean: we appear to them to be misrepresenting and libelling human nature. When they hear that we must be created anew in Christ Jesus, and "be renewed in the spirit of our minds," that "old things must pass away, and all things must become new," and that "except we be born again, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven," they have no idea what it is that we mean; but without much inquiry they take for granted that these are some gloomy or extravagant notions of wild enthusiasts. When they hear that we must "flee to Christ for refuge," just as the man who had accidentally slain a person fled to the City of Refuge from the pursuer of blood; and that, if we do not actually get our souls washed in his blood, we must eternally perish; we seem to them to be alarming men without necessity, and to be discouraging the practice of good works. So also, when they hear that we are to devote ourselves altogether unto God, "living not to ourselves but unto him," and "walking in all things as Christ walked," we appear to them to be requiring a degree of sanctity that is not to be attained, and that is incompatible with the common offices of life. Their own notions are so deeply rooted in their minds; and they pay so little attention to any thing spoken in the Scriptures, that they cannot conceive how sentiments so different from those which they have imbibed, can possibly be true.

To counteract this fatal evil, I would earnestly intreat all to lay

lay aside their pre-conceived notions, and to come to the Sacred Volume, not as critics to sit in judgment upon God, but as little children to be instructed by him: on opening that blessed book, we should lift up our hearts to God, and pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."]

2. By their worldliness—

[It is surprising to what an extent the love of this world yet predominated in the hearts of the Apostles. One would have supposed, that now at least for a few moments they should lose sight of their ambitious projects, and turn their minds to higher objects of pursuit: but not all that our Lord had said respecting his own sufferings, had in the least damped their expectations of worldly good: for St. Matthew tells us, that "THEN came James and John, with their mother Salome, uniting their requests, that these two might be the chief ministers in his kingdom:" and the other ten Apostles, instead of pitying them for their folly, were "filled with indignation against them, for endeavouring to secure posts of honour, which they were equally entitled to, and equally ambitious to attain." Can we wonder that, in such a state of mind as this, they could not comprehend what our Lord spoke about his sufferings and death?

Here again we see whence it is that men are so slow of heart to receive the self-denying truths of the Gospel: We call men to renounce the world, to "come out from it," to "be crucified to it," to consider themselves altogether as "pilgrims and sojourners in it," and to "have their conversation in heaven:" but how can they comply with such exhortations as these? We tell them, that if they will be Christ's disciples, they must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow him: We tell them, that they must be conformed to him in sufferings, if ever they will be partakers with him in glory: but how can they endure such doctrines who are looking for wealth and honour and ease as the great sources of their happiness in life? "How can they believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?" We have a remarkable illustration of this truth in the conduct of the Pharisees: Our Lord had told them that they "could not serve God and Mammon:" and immediately it is recorded of them, that "*being covetous, they derided him*:" What! was there any thing absurd in our Lord's declarations? No: but the Pharisees were reduced to the necessity of condemning either themselves or him: themselves they would not condemn, because they were determined not to renounce their covetous desires; and therefore

^c Matt. xx. 19, 20, 21, 24.

^d Luke xvi. 14:

therefore they condemned him as a weak, foolish enthusiast. Thus it is with worldlings in every age and place. Not but that they see more than they are willing to confess; but that, "being averse to receive the truth, God gives them over to their own delusions, till at last they believe their own lie^c."

How then shall this evil be counteracted? Let us be aware that there is a bias within us, and that Satan makes use of our corruptions to blind our eyes and to harden our hearts. Let us beg of God to take the veil from our hearts, and so to irradiate our minds with divine knowledge, that we shall be constrained to "receive the truth in the love thereof."

From hence arise two obvious and important QUESTIONS:

1. What know I of Christ?

[We have certainly in some respects the advantage of the Apostles during the time of Christ's continuance on earth; because we have clearer light given us, and fewer prejudices to contend with. We therefore, as far as respects our speculative views of Christianity, are better instructed than they. But wherein do we differ from them in their *practical* views? Are we not as blind to the spiritual nature of the Gospel as they? We see indeed that Christ had suffered; but do we see the *necessity* of those sufferings for *our* salvation, and the *sufficiency* of them for the salvation of *the whole world*? Or, if we do see these truths *notionally*, do we view them as the life, the soul, the essence of all religion? Do we live upon them, and glory in them, from day to day? — — — Before we can know them *thus*, we must be "taught of God:" the Lord Jesus himself must "open our understandings," as he did those of his Disciples: and the Holy Ghost must "shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We must "receive the Spirit which is of God, before we can know the things that are freely given to us of God^d."] .

2. What am I doing for Christ?

["Surely, if he so willingly gave himself up to sufferings *for me*, I am not afraid of sufferings *for him*; I am ready to "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach." He has told me, that, if I will be faithful to him, the world will hate me as it hated him, and persecute me as it persecuted him. Do these predictions alarm me? and, when I see them fulfilled in others, do I study how I may avoid the accomplishment of them in my own case? Surely, if my heart were right with him, I should be willing to receive him on his own terms,

^c 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

^d 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11, 14. & 2 Cor. iv. 6.

terms, and to follow him in his own way; and, if called to suffer for him, I should "rejoice that I am counted worthy to do so." Is this then my spirit? and is it my one wish, desire, and labour, that "Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or death?" Oh! that we all might be able to appeal to God, that this is indeed our daily experience! Let us remember, that Christ not only died, but *rose again*, according to his predictions; and then the shame of his cross was for ever rolled away. So shall it be with us; we may be persecuted for his sake even unto death; but in the resurrection our crown of glory shall be proportionably bright: let us be contented therefore to "suffer with him, that we may reign with him;" and, in spite of men and devils, let us endeavour to glorify him here, that we may hereafter be glorified with him in a better world.]

DCCLXXXII.

THE CONVERSION OF ZACCHEUS.

Luke xix. 9. *And Jesus said unto him, this day is salvation come to this house.*

IT is said of our blessed Lord, that "he went about doing good." But the good which he did was principally to the bodies of men; the work of converting and saving their souls, was to be carried on principally after his death by the instrumentality of his Apostles. There were, however, some instances, wherein he wrought effectually to the conversion of men's souls. At the time of his death, the number of his disciples amounted to about five hundred. Amongst that happy number was Zaccheus, of whose conversion we are informed in the passage before us.

Zaccheus was a rich Publican, or Tax-gatherer; having heard much of the fame of Jesus, he was desirous to see him; but, being small of stature, he could not easily accomplish his wish: he therefore ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore-tree, near which Jesus was about to pass; and thus secured the desired gratification. But, to his utter surprise, Jesus called him down from the tree, invited himself as a guest to his house, and, as the event proved, converted and saved his soul.

Now

Now in this history we see,

I. In what way salvation is imparted—

Doubtless there is a great diversity in the experience of different people: some are called to the knowledge of Christ more suddenly, others more gradually; some with deeper convictions of their guilt and danger, and others in a more easy and placid way: but in some things all are agreed: to whomsoever salvation comes, it is in the first instance,

1. Unmerited—

[It is evident that Zaccheus did not merit salvation: he was an unjust and oppressive man; and though he might not deserve such opprobrium as the Jews cast upon him, as though he were the vilest of characters, yet it is plain, from his own acknowledgment, that he had availed himself of the power vested in him by the Romans, to extort more than by the laws he was entitled to; and he had thereby considerably augmented his own wealth. But if no such conduct could have been imputed to him, yet must salvation have been to him an unmerited gift: for, as sinners, we all deserve the wrath of God: and they who deserve his wrath, certainly cannot deserve his favour. "If we had done all that is commanded us, we should still be unprofitable servants;" and therefore we must for ever renounce all idea of merit, and look for salvation as the free gift of God in Christ Jesus.]

2. Unsolicited—

[We read not of any application that Zaccheus made to Jesus: on the contrary, Jesus prevented him with the blessings of his goodness. It is thus with all of us in the first communication of grace to the soul: as the Prophet says, "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not." I do not say, that, when grace is imparted to the soul, we shall not pray: for we certainly shall wait upon God in fervent supplication; and on this is suspended all our hope of divine blessings: "we must ask, and seek, and knock, if we would have the door of mercy opened to us." But this, I say, that, in the first instance, previously to the communication of divine grace to the soul, we do not pray for it; but God imparts it of his own mind and will. We are like Lazarus in the grave, till God speaks the word, and says, Come forth: nor do we ever begin to pray, till God of his own grace and mercy has given us "a Spirit of grace and of supplication."]

3. Unthought

3. Unthought of—

[Zaccheus' mind was as much as ever set upon his wealth; and his only view in wishing to see Jesus, was to gratify his curiosity. Nothing was further from his thoughts than the idea of becoming a stated follower of Christ, and an heir of his salvation. Thus does God still "bring the blind by a way that they know not, and lead them in paths that they have not known." By his Providence he leads persons into such situations and circumstances as shall be favourable for the communication of his grace. Little did Zaccheus imagine what would be the result of his climbing up into the tree, or what God intended, when he inclined his mind to adopt such a measure for the gratifying of his curiosity: and little do many think, when God leads them to this or that place, or visits them with this or that affliction, what the issue of it will be: but God, who sees the end from the beginning, so orders all events, that the purposes of his grace towards his chosen people may be accomplished.]

That this is a just view of the subject we cannot doubt, when we are told, that "God is the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift;" and "that he gives us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." If holy desires and purposes originated first with ourselves, we should have whereof to glory: but since the first desire after salvation is no less the gift of God than salvation itself, the whole praise of it, from first to last, must be given to God alone.

In this part of our subject we wish not to be misunderstood: we do not say, that the parallel between Zaccheus and others holds good in *the suddenness* of his conversion: for though God *may* convert persons as suddenly now, as he did in the days of old, we apprehend, that conversion in these days is for the most part gradual and progressive. But, with respect to the first imparting of the divine life to the soul, we conceive that there is no difference between him and us; it is alike in all cases, unmerited, unsolicited, unthought of.]

The resemblance between his salvation and ours may be yet further seen,

II. In the manner in which it operates—

Exceeding different were the effects produced,

1. On the receiver—

[No sooner had the grace of Christ wrought effectually on the heart of Zaccheus, than he approved himself indeed to be a Child of Abraham.

Behold the change wrought in him *in reference to Christ*. Before, he had no regard for Christ: but now he came down gladly, and received him joyfully to his house, and accounted

an intercourse with him as the most desirable of all blessings. See the change also *in reference to his fellow-creatures*. Before, he had disregarded all the duties both of justice and mercy; and now he set himself to the diligent performance of them. Had he wronged any person, either by false accusation, or in any other way? he would now make restitution even four-fold, or to the utmost demands of the Law*. Had he overlooked the necessities of the poor? he would, from this moment, consecrate to their service one half of his possessions. Here we see the invariable effects of grace upon the soul: it will change all our dispositions and conduct: it will make us to delight ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to desire above all things the advancement of his glory. It will make us also to fill up in a very different way our duties in society. Instead of leaving us under the influence of covetous practices and selfish passions, it will cause us to seek our happiness in diffusing happiness around us: it will never suffer us to rest till we have made restitution to all whom we may have injured, and to undo (as far as possible) all the evil we have done; and it will lead us to do in all things as we would in a change of circumstances have others do to us.]

2. On the beholders—

[One would have supposed, that, on seeing such a change wrought on a notorious sinner, all who beheld it should magnify the grace of Christ, and admire his condescension to one who was so generally detested. But the spectators were filled rather with spleen and envy; and took occasion to pour contempt on Zaccheus, on account of his past character, and to murmur against Jesus for going to be a guest with him. It was thus that the elder brother in the parable was indignant at his father's reception of the prodigal son: he would not so much as own him for a brother: but said to his father, "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this *thy Son* was come, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." And thus it is whenever any conversion takes place, especially among the profligate, and still more if they be rich: it is always made by the proud Pharisee an occasion of pouring contempt on the converts themselves, and of venting his indignation against the Gospel of Christ. Thus is the very grace of Christ, no less than the exhibition of it in the Gospel, "a savour of life unto life to some, and to others a savour of death unto death."]

OBSERVATIONS—

1. How desirable it is to be found attending on God's ordinances—

[It

* Exod. xxii. 1.

[It is there, if we may so speak, that Jesus passes by; and there that we may expect to get a sight of him. But when he will be pleased to reveal himself to us, we know not. This however we know, that, whensoever that blessed event shall take place, it will richly repay us for all the efforts we have made. That difficulties may sometimes lie in our way, is probable enough; but we should not too easily yield to them. The difficulty that presented itself to Zaccheus, was real: he was small of stature, and could not get a sight of Jesus for "the press" that surrounded him. But this put him on the use of an expedient, by which he succeeded. So we, if we were intent upon it, might often overcome the obstacles that oppose our attendance on divine ordinances. There is "a press" of company or of business that obstructs our way: but we may run away from it, or go before it, or by various means avoid it: and, if we are in earnest to get a sight of him, we may reasonably hope that he will not suffer us to be disappointed. Many who have come hither from no better motive than curiosity, have found salvation unexpectedly brought home to their souls: how much more may this blessed effect be hoped for, if we come to seek salvation itself! Let us hope then, that *this is the day* appointed in the Divine counsels for the communication of life to our souls: and that the grace which triumphed so gloriously in the conversion of Zaccheus, shall now be magnified towards us. If only our souls be willing to receive Christ, we are authorized to say, "*This is the day.*" Nay, more; the very thing which was imputed to him as a fault, he will do again, as often as he is invited; "he will come and be — — — guest with a man that is a sinner."]

2. How happy are they to whose conversion the ordinances are made effectual—

[That very day and hour that the soul is converted unto God, "salvation" comes to it: and who can ever justly appreciate the import of that word? To speak of salvation in its full extent, would lead us too far. View it only in its present effects.

How happy was Zaccheus rendered in his own soul! From that moment his heart was filled with joys to which he had been before an utter stranger. Now he felt that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," that "joy that is unspeakable and glorified" — — — Many would have envied him as a rich sinner: but his state was far more enviable when he was a saint, and stripped of half his wealth, or even if he had lost the whole that he possessed.

What a source of happiness also did he now become to all around him! To "his house," as well as to himself, did "salvation come:" for who would receive it in his own soul, and not

not endeavour to communicate it to all connected with him? — — — To *them* also *who transacted business with him* did the benefit extend. He would no longer oppress them, as he had formerly done; but, act agreeably to the dictates of strict justice. He would sooner lose all his gains, and be reduced to poverty, than enrich himself by extortion. And what a comfort arose to *the poor*! These had derived but little good hitherto from his opulence: but henceforth they were sure to find him the kindest friend. At one single gift, the half of his property was consecrated to their relief; and doubtless they would, together with pecuniary aid, receive from him also the benefit of his advice.

Behold then, what happiness resulted from this one instance of conversion! Doubtless, the angels in heaven rejoiced at it: and well may every such change be a ground of praise and thanksgiving to all who behold it. Let proud Pharisees “murmur,” if they will: but let us bless God for every such communication of his grace, and pray that such converts may be multiplied throughout the world.]

DCCLXXXIII.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO BEAR PERSECUTION.

Luke xxi. 17—19. *Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls.*

IN applying to ourselves the addresses of our Lord to his Disciples, we are liable to err, if we do not distinguish between their situation and our own. As far as we are in their circumstances, the application will be just, but no further. They were taught to expect on trying occasions such aid from God, as would entirely supersede the necessity of study on their part: but if *we* should form such expectations, we should only tempt God, and expose his cause to the derision of his enemies. Nevertheless, inasmuch as we are subject to many of the same difficulties with them, we may reasonably hope for the same supports and consolations. Though therefore we willingly concede, that it would be enthusiastic and absurd in us to expect the miraculous influences which were vouchsafed to them, we may regard the

word

783.] ENCOURAGEMENT TO BEAR PERSECUTION. 667
words before us addressed to ourselves. In them we have,

I. An alarming declaration—

[Piety has been an object of aversion to fallen man in all ages^b — — — Where it has appeared in its most perfect forms, it has been most reviled and persecuted^c — — — It might have been hoped indeed that the glorious effects of Christianity would disarm its enemies; but the enmity of the human heart against God has never appeared so strong, as it has since the establishment of Christianity in the world — — — And to this hour does a conformity to its precepts call forth the same wrath and bitterness as it did in the Apostle's days. The laws enacted for its support do indeed restrain men from executing all that is in their hearts: but the words of our Lord are still verified in every place; nor can any wisdom or prudence in the professors of religion exempt them from the reproach connected with it. Amongst other reasons for the aversion of men to Christianity in the first ages, a very prominent one was, that it was an unaccommodating religion, and claimed, not only a pre-eminence above every other, but an exclusive existence in the world. Had the followers of Jesus been content that his name should have been enrolled among the list of heathen deities, they would have been no more hated than the professors of any other religion: and if at this time the followers of Christ would connive at the existence of other tenets and other practices than those which Christianity enjoins, they would be admired, rather than hated, by an ungodly world; but their exclusive claims in its behalf subject them to the fiercest resentment of those who are hostile to its requisitions. Not content with serving the Lord Jesus Christ themselves, they call upon all others to serve him too, and *that* at the peril of their souls: hence all who are determined to follow their own ways must, in their own vindication as it were, condemn those who so greatly differ from them: and hence, as long as that difference exists in the world, the enmity excited by it will operate.]

To fortify us against these trials, our Lord graciously gives us,

II. A consoling promise—

[The expression used by our Lord was proverbial: it occurs in many other parts of Scripture; and signifies, that no real evil shall arise to the person of whom it is spoken. It cannot mean that he shall experience *no* trouble; for in the preceding

^b 1 John iii. 12. Gal. iv. 29.

^c Acts vii. 52. & 1 Cor. iv. 9.

preceding context it is said, that "many shall be put to death:" but it is equivalent to that expression of St. Peter, "Who is he that shall *harm* you, if ye be followers of that which is good^d?" and it accords with that promise of God by the prophet Jeremiah, "Turn ye every one from your evil ways, and I will do you *no hurt*." Two things are implied in it; namely, that no evil whatever shall accrue to the person but by the express permission of God; and that none shall be inflicted, which shall not be over-ruled for his eternal good.

Little do the world think how much their powers are limited by the special Providence of God. They boast of their purposes; but find that "wherein they deal proudly, there is One that is above them," "who disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that they cannot perform their enterprize^f." Laban and Esau menaced great things against the defenceless Jacob; but they could effect nothing: and every Believer may address his enemies in the words of Christ to Pilate, "Ye can have no power at all against me, except it be given you from above."

The Christian's enemies do indeed often appear to triumph: but it is in appearance only, and not in reality; for they can do nothing which God will not "make to work together for good to them that love him." If they injure his body, and benefit his soul, what harm do they inflict? if they deprive him of earthly comforts, but occasion him to receive a richer reward in heaven, what loss does he sustain? Verily the efforts of the most malignant amongst them shall only operate as a furnace to purge him from his dross, or as a cross-wind to fill all his sails, and waft him with more rapidity to his desired haven.]

But as flesh and blood must feel, and are too apt to faint, our Lord adds,

III. An encouraging direction—

[*Self-possession* is the privilege of all who trust in God; "They that believe shall not make haste." The unreasonableness of wicked men is apt to discompose us; and their virulence, to grieve us: but by patience we are enabled to bear up against every species of oppression, and to retain the same tranquillity of mind as if we were in a state of perfect ease: "I will keep him in perfect peace," saith God, "whose mind is stayed on me." This then is the direction given us by our Lord, "In your patience possess ye your souls;" "let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing^g."

Yield

^d 1 Pet. iii. 13.

^f Job. v. 12.

^g Jer. xxv. 5, 6.

^h Jam. i. 4.

Yield not to irritation. The instant that anger arises in your bosoms, you are "overcome of evil:" whereas your duty is, "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good."

Yield not to dejection. Your trials may be long and heavy, but they are all appointed in number, weight, and duration. See the experience of the apostle Paul^b: that experience shall be yours; and "your strength shall be according to your day."

Yield not to fear. "Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, or of the Son of Man, that shall be as grass?" However formidable your enemies may appear, the advice of Peter to you is, "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your heartsⁱ." "Be careful for nothing;" but "cast all your care on him who careth for you."]

For the CONCLUSION of this subject, we shall,

1. Correct some mistakes in relation to it—

[Religious people are apt to imagine, that every cross which they are called to bear, is the cross of Christ; and that they should use no means to avoid it: but it is no uncommon thing for them to bring trials upon themselves by their own imprudence, or perhaps even by very reprehensible misconduct. Of such St. Peter speaks; contrasting their sufferings with those which are endured for the name of Christ; and affirming, that their troubles are a ground of shame rather than of glorying^k. It would be well if those who make religion a pretext for neglecting their relative duties, would consider this: for, whatever they may imagine, their cross is not the cross of Christ, but *their own*; nor will it ever bring either honour to God, or benefit to themselves. Moreover, if a cross be really coming upon us for the name of Christ, we may without any impropriety endeavour to avoid it. We must not indeed sacrifice a good conscience, even for the avoiding of death itself. Daniel would not so much as shut his window when he prayed, because it would have been a denial of his God^l: but our Lord told his Disciples, that "if men persecuted them in one city, they should flee to another:" and Paul on many occasions fled from his enemies, and made considerable sacrifices to abate their prejudice^m. Thus also should we act: we should be careful never unnecessarily to bring a cross upon ourselves; we should even use any prudent means to avoid the cross of Christ: but when we have no alternative but to bear it, or to make shipwreck

^b 2 Cor. iv. 8—10.

ⁱ Dan. vi. 10.

^k 1 Pet. iii. 14, 15.

^l 1 Pet. iv. 14—16.

^m Acts ix. 25/ & xxi, 21—26. & xxiii. 6.

shipwreck of a good conscience, then we must “take it up,” and “glory in it.”]

2. Suggest some considerations for a suitable improvement of it—

[First; If all men conspire to hate and persecute the disciples of Christ, *let the disciples at least take care to love one another, and to strengthen each other's hands by a firm and indissoluble union amongst themselves.* The ungodly will triumph not a little, if they can see Christians quarrelling among themselves, and hating and reviling each other — — —

Next; *Let us duly reflect whose cross it is that we are called to bear.* Did we but consider what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us, we should account no cross heavy, nor any affliction long — — —

Lastly; *Let us look forward to the eternal world:* there, all our trials will be compensated; and “our light and momentary afflictions be recompensed with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” — — —]

DCCLXXXIV.

CHRIST'S SUFFERING IN THE GARDEN.

Luke xxii. 39—46. *And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the Mount of Olives; and his Disciples also followed him. And when he was, at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his Disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow; and said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*

IT was foretold of the Messiah, that he should be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:” and we are informed that he had scarcely come into the world before his life was sought for, and he was carried by his parents a fugitive to a foreign land, in order to escape the cruel effects of Herod's jealousy. During the four years of his Ministry, much is told us of his trials: but the principal scene of them was reserved for the close of his life. We propose to contemplate

contemplate them, from their commencement in the garden of Gethsemane till the time that he expired upon the cross. At present we shall confine our attention to the words before us; in which we may see,

I. The tremendous sufferings of our Lord—

It is impossible for us fully to conceive how great they were; but we may form some idea of them by contemplating,

1. The terms in which they are expressed—

[*The Prophets* foretell in most awful colours his unparalleled affliction^a: while the terms used by *the Evangelists* record it with all the force that language can convey^b. What must he have endured to justify such representations as these?]

2. The effects which they produced—

[Two in particular must be noticed; namely, his *repeated supplications*, and his *bloody sweat*. Had his sufferings been merely such as martyrs have endured, he would doubtless have borne them with unshaken fortitude. But the wrath of God, who could bear? To deprecate the cup *in the manner he did*, detracted nothing from his willingness or determination to suffer all that was necessary for our salvation: he only desired the removal of the cup, in case it were consistent with the will and honour of God to save men without his drinking of it. And though this could not be granted as to *the strict letter* of the petition, yet it was granted *in the spirit*; for an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen and support his fainting humanity: so careful was God to testify his approbation of him, on that as well as every other occasion. Indeed the answer given to these prayers is particularly recorded^c: and as the administering of sufficient grace to St. Paul was a better answer to his prayer than the removal of the thorn in his flesh would have been^d, so was this the best answer to Jesus; who was thereby confirmed in his purposes, and enabled to persevere in his arduous undertaking.

And

^a See Ps. xviii. 4, 5. & xxiii. 14, 15. & lv. 4, 5. & lxix. 1—3.

^b Matthew (xxvi. 38.) says, he was περιλυτός, surrounded with grief. Mark (xiv. 33.) says, he began ἐκθαμβῶσθαι καὶ ἀδυναμεῖν, that is, to be exceedingly astonished, and to be overwhelmed with anguish. John (xii. 27.) represents him as saying, “My soul ταρασσεται, which expresses great perturbation of mind. And in my text, he is said to be ἐν αγωνία.

^c Heb. v. 7.

^d 2 Cor. xii. 8—10.

And who can conceive what he must have suffered, when at midnight, in the open air, in a cold season^o, he sweat, so that great drops of blood issued from every pore of his body through excess of agony? At this time he drank the dregs of that cup of bitterness which we ought to have been drinking to all eternity. We forbear to expatiate upon what we do not at all understand; and content ourselves with applying to him those words of the Prophet, "Surely never sorrow was like unto his sorrow^f."]

Glad should we be for the honour of human nature, if we could say that his earthly friends shewed that attention to him that his state required: but we can speak of nothing but,

II. The lethargic indolence of his Disciples—

While he was racked with agonies, they, alas! were sleeping—

[He had charged them to "watch and pray, lest they should enter into temptation." But scarcely was he parted from them before they fell asleep: and though he repeatedly came and reprov'd them from their drowsiness, yet as repeatedly they gave way to it, till at last the time for watching was expired.

This stupor however did not proceed from indifference, or a willing dereliction of duty. Our Lord offered for them this apology, that "their spirit was willing, but their flesh was weak." The fact was, that they were overcome "with sorrow." Grief, when not very excessive, will disturb the rest, and occasion wakefulness: but when it attains a certain height, and has been prolonged beyond a certain time, it will operate rather to stun and stupify. A blow may be so severe, as to deprive us of all sense of feeling; and grief also may be so heavy, as ultimately to induce a torpor. Not many indeed have felt this overwhelming pressure, especially as arising from a sense of sin; but some have felt it, and can affirm from experience that this statement is true.

But though this torpor may be accounted for, the Disciples were not therefore blameless: for they ought to have resisted it with more energy, and to have raised their exertions in proportion as their difficulties were increased.]

Yet the admonition he gave them, breathed nothing but gentleness and love—

[Persons under affliction are apt to betray an irritability of mind, especially if they have reason to think themselves neglected by their servants or friends. But though our Lord

had

^o John xviii. 18.

^f Lam. i. 12.

had so much reason to complain, he expostulated with his Disciples in the tenderest manner; "Why sleep ye? Can ye not watch with me one hour? rise and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." With this address they were confounded indeed; and well they might be confounded, seeing that they had been accustomed to keep awake whole nights when engaged with their nets; but could not watch one hour either in Tabor^s or Gethsemane. Alas! that persons, so highly distinguished as they, should give such reason to apprehend, that neither a sight of their Master's glory, nor a view of his sufferings, were half so interesting to them as their worldly occupations. But though they were put to shame by his repeated admonitions, they were not effectually roused: they were no sooner awaked than they fell asleep again, till at last their enemies came upon them: and they instantly shewed, by their rash defence and cowardly desertion of their Lord, what loss they had sustained in sleeping away the season of watchfulness and prayer.]

We may hence take occasion to OBSERVE,

1. How terrible shall we find it, if ever we be called to bear the penalty of sin!

[In our blessed Lord there was not the smallest spot of sin: yet we see how he agonized and fainted when our sins were laid upon him. What then must we, who are so full of all unrighteousness, endure, if we should have to bear the burthen of our own iniquities! "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry^b?"

2. What folly is it to indulge sloth and stupor in our hearts!

[We have seen what loss the Disciples sustained, and how, notwithstanding repeated admonitions, they were surprized at last. And what if death should surprize us in like manner? O that this may not be our unhappy lot! But let us remember, that we have been often warned; that we have not the same excuse to palliate our guilt; and that, if taken unprepared, we perish for ever.]

3. How different is the cup which God has put into our hands!

[Our blessed Saviour drank the cup of wrath, in order that we might have "the cup of salvation." O think how different our lot from his, and from what ours must have been, if he had not undertaken our cause!

It is true, we may yet have sorrow mixed with our cup in the dispensations of Providence: but, if we belong to Christ,

we

^s Luke ix. 32.

^b Luke xxiii. 31.

we shall never taste one drop of *wrath*: the cup that is put into our hands is mixed by Infinite Wisdom, and, however bitter it may be, its every ingredient is *love*¹.]

¹ Heb. xii. 6.

DCCLXXXV.

OUR LORD'S EATING THE LAST PASSOVER WITH HIS DISCIPLES.

Luke xxii. 14—16. *And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve Apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*

SUPPOSING the holy Scriptures to have been written by Divine inspiration, and Jesus Christ to have been the Son of the Most High God, we should expect that every thing related of him would have the stamp and character of his perfections. There would be a consistency in all that belonged to him: in what belonged to him as God, he would appear as God; and in what belonged to him as Man, he would be found altogether pure and spotless. This consistency we do find; nor does he ever for a moment say or do any thing which is not worthy of himself. The time is come for his celebration of the Passover, on the very night previous to his death. He orders his Disciples to go into the city, and make ready for him. But where shall they go? He bids them enter into the city, and inform a person whom they shall meet bearing a pitcher of water, that their Master would eat the Passover at his house; and he assures them that the person will, without hesitation; shew them a large upper room furnished, and affording every accommodation that they can wish. Nor need they send any person to tell him what house they are at, as he will be in no danger of wanting any such information. Here, we see him, as the omniscient God, declaring with infallible certainty the most contingent events: and when he comes to his Disciples, behold, he forgets all his own approaching sufferings, and is intent only on promoting their

their eternal welfare. The last evening was arrived, when he was to conflict with all the powers of darkness, and to be delivered into the hands of sinners. This he well knew; and therefore, one would suppose, should have greatly dreaded the approaching hour: but, instead of dreading it for himself, he earnestly desired it for their good: "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not eat any more thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Here two inquiries arise; and they will afford a profitable subject for our present contemplation:

I. Why did he so desire to eat the Passover with them at that time?

Many reasons doubtless conspired to make him so desirous of it. It would afford him a valuable opportunity,

1. Of manifesting his love to them—

[Parting friends are usually anxious to give to each other some lasting token of their mutual regard. Our blessed Lord, in particular, was glad to avail himself of the opportunity which the Paschal feast would afford him for this purpose. That feast was attended with repeated washings of the hands of him who presided at it: but our Lord, having his Disciples alone with him, instead of washing his own hands, took a towel, and girded himself, and washed their feet: nor would he suffer any one of them to decline accepting this token of his love: so anxious was he to convince them all, that "having loved them, he loved them to the end." Nor did he by this action merely express to them his own love, but shewed them what sentiments they should entertain towards each other, and towards all his people to the end of time: they should account no service too humiliating to perform for the lowest member of his mystical body; but every one should make it the summit of his ambition to become the servant of all.]

2. Of conveying instruction to their minds—

[They had been frequently informed of his approaching sufferings and death; inasmuch, that though they did not fully comprehend these predictions, they were much troubled and perplexed in relation to them. They were now, like ground that has been ploughed up, and watered with plenteous rains, prepared to receive into their bosoms the good

good seed, the Word of life. Our Lord therefore now opened to them, more fully than on any other occasion, all the deepest mysteries of his religion. He told them plainly who he was, even one with the Father, insomuch that "whosoever had seen him, had seen the Father." He told them also, whither, and for what end, he was going; even to his Father's House, "to prepare places for them." He told them, that his departure was altogether "expedient for them;" so that if they considered it aright, instead of mourning on account of it; they would rejoice: for that he would send to them the Holy Ghost to be their abiding Comforter and Guide; yea, he himself would hear and answer every petition that they should present to the Father in his name; nay more, though removed from them as to his body, he would come and manifest himself to them, and even dwell in them, by his Spirit. He opened to them also the nature and intent of his death, which was to procure "for them the remission of their sins;" and shewed them, that, notwithstanding his removal from them, they should be united to him, as branches to the vine, and, by constant communications of grace and strength from him, be enabled to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory. In a word, in his discourses at this feast, he brought forth every subject which their necessities required, and presented it in such a view as should most conduce to their lasting edification and comfort^b.]

3. Of commending them to God in prayer—

[Doubtless he had oftentimes prayed with them: but this last prayer was peculiarly tender and impressive. It is the delight of pious friends, when parting to meet no more, to commend each other into the hands of their common Father, in the hope and prospect of seeing each other again in a better world. Thus did our blessed Lord on this occasion. He had taken the charge of his Disciples in this world, and had kept them all in safety, the traitor alone excepted, according to the predictions concerning him; and now he intreats his Father to keep them; that, through their ministrations, his name may be made known to the ends of the earth; and, through their exalted love and piety, the whole world may have an evidence, both of the truth of his Mission, and of the sanctifying efficacy of his religion. And, that they might have the fuller assurance of meeting him again in a better world, he prays, or rather I should say, he declares it to be his unalterable *will*, that they all should be with him in that kingdom to which he was going, and should behold his glory there for ever and ever^c. Surely they never could forget

^b Read attentively the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of St. John.

^c See 17th chapter of St. John.

forget that prayer so solemnly offered, so tenderly expressed, so richly fraught with instruction and heavenly consolation.]

4. Of preparing them fully for his departure—

[His approaching sufferings must of necessity prove a great stumbling-block in their way: but when they should recollect what he had told them previously to his death, their hopes would revive, and they would be encouraged to expect the full accomplishment of all his promises. To produce this effect was a very principal object of this last discourse^d: and how completely it was attained, the Apostles themselves inform us: they thought his former discourses had been obscure parables in comparison of this: but this appeared to them simple and intelligible; insomuch that it removed all remaining doubt from their minds respecting his Divine Mission^e. It is true, we find, that, on the apprehension of their Lord, they all forsook him and fled; and for some time they scarcely knew how to believe the joyful tidings respecting his resurrection from the dead: but, from the moment that they were convinced of that fact, we see a steadfastness in them which was evidently the result of these previous instructions; and their whole future lives demonstrated what unspeakable benefit they had received from them.]

Such were the grounds, we conceive, on which our Lord so earnestly desired to eat the Passover with them at that time. We are next to inquire,

II. Why he determined to eat it with them no more—

If he had pleased, he might have continued upon earth after his resurrection, or come down again from heaven at that season of the year to eat it with them again. But, independent of many other considerations, there were two reasons in particular, why he would not celebrate with them that ordinance any more:

1. Because it was now about to be fulfilled and abrogated—

[The Passover was instituted only for a time, till the more perfect dispensation of the Messiah should be introduced. For both *the occasion of that ordinance, and the ordinance itself*, were altogether typical. The occasion of that ordinance was the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, which was typical of the redemption of the world, from sin and Satan, death and hell. The Paschal Lamb also, which was to be roasted, and eaten

^d See John xiii. 19. & xiv. 25. & xvi. 4, 33. & xvii. 13.

^e John xvi. 28—30.

eaten with bitter herbs, and not a bone of which was to be broken, was typical of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was to endure the extremest agonies both of soul and body as a sacrifice for sin, yet was not to have one bone of his body broken. To the completion of this type in the Lord Jesus Christ the apostle Paul bears witness, saying, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast." This therefore was the deliverance which was henceforth to be celebrated in the Church; and in comparison of it the deliverance from Egypt was no more to be remembered^f — — — From this time therefore the shadows were to flee away, seeing that the good things which they prefigured were now arrived: the New covenant, with every thing relating to it, was now established; and therefore the Old covenant, with all its carnal ordinances, having waxed old, was to vanish away^g.

Now it was of great importance to the whole Church that this matter should be fully understood: and therefore our blessed Lord informed his Disciples, that, since "the Passover would now be fulfilled in the kingdom of God," or in the dispensation which he was about to introduce, there would be no more occasion for the Jewish rites and ceremonies, not even for that which was the most solemn and sacred of them all^h.]

2. Because other memorials of his love were now to be established—

[The Lord's Supper was now instituted for the purpose of exhibiting to the world the wonders of his love; and of perpetuating in the Church the remembrance of it to the end of time. In the breaking of the bread, was represented the rending of his body on the cross; and in the pouring out of the wine, the effusion of his blood: and the partaking of those sacred elements which nourish the body, represented the nourishing of our souls by a believing application to Christ as 'our atoning Sacrifice.' This is the feast which his people are now to keep: of this all are to partake, provided they desire to have redemption through his blood, and can partake of it with the bitter herbs of real humiliation. *This feast he will keep with us*; not indeed by his *bodily* presence, but by that which is infinitely more important, his *spiritual* presence with our souls: 'I will come unto you,' says he, 'and sup with you, and you with me.' Nor was this the privilege only of his own immediate Disciples, but of all who shall believe

^f Jer. xxiii. 5—8.

^g Heb. viii. 13.

^h The word "*until*" does not import, that our Lord would keep the feast *after* it had been accomplished in him, but that he *never* would keep it again. It is an Hebraism, frequent in the Scriptures.

believe in him through their word : " Lo, says he, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How earnestly should we desire communion with Christ !

[Did he forget all his approaching sufferings, that he might instruct and comfort his Disciples ? O how should we rise above all considerations whether of pain or pleasure, to enjoy fellowship with him ! How should we seek instruction from him as the first and greatest of all blessings ! I am far from saying that we should neglect any earthly duty whatever ; but we should consider every thing in this world as altogether worthless in comparison of him : joys should be no joys, any further than they will consist with a sense of his love ; nor should sorrows be regarded for a moment, if they be endured for his sake, or can be rendered subservient to his glory. To hear his voice, and learn his will, and taste his love, and follow his steps, and secure a participation of his glory, *this* should be our one desire, our continued labour, our supreme delight.]

2. How delighted should we be with the thoughts of death !

[At death, this whole work of redemption will be fully completed. *In Christ* it is completed *now* ; in *us* it will not be fully completed, till all the remains of sin are done away. That will take place at the moment of our release from this mortal body : and then we shall keep the feast in a better manner. Our Lord has taught us to expect a renewal of this feast in the realms above : he has told us, that " he will drink of new wine with us in his Father's kingdom¹." O what a feast will that be ! We need not envy then the beloved Apostle, who at the Last Supper lay in his Saviour's bosom : for we ourselves shall, like Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, recline upon the bosom of our blessed Lord. Should we not then look forward to that time with holy desire, " looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of our Lord ?" Should not the language of us all be, " Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly ?" Let not death, which is to introduce us to such bliss, be formidable in our eyes : but let us be anxious only to be counted worthy of that honour which he has prepared for us, and be " longing to be dissolved, that we may be with Christ."]

¹ Matt. xxvi. 29.

DCCLXXXVI.

THE TREASON OF JUDAS.

Luke xxii. 48. *Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?*

VIRTUE is best discerned when it is subjected to the heaviest trials. The stroke of the hammer displays the excellence of the diamond; and the furnace ascertains the purity of the gold. Meekness and patience are mere dormant qualities, till injuries or misfortunes call them into exercise. Let our character be blasted, our interests ruined, our person injured; and then it will appear how far these qualities exist within us, and to what extent they will enable us to support our burthens. Had our blessed Lord himself been viewed in a season of perfect tranquillity, his unrivalled glories would have shone only as the sun behind a cloud: but when he laboured under severe and complicated afflictions, then his brightness beamed forth in its meridian splendor. His circumstances were peculiarly painful at the time when he uttered the words before us. He had been sustaining a conflict with all the powers of darkness, and drinking that cup of wrath which his Father had put into his hands. He had seen with grief the supineness of his three Disciples, who, notwithstanding his repeated warnings, had consumed in sleep the time which should have been spent in watchfulness and prayer. To add to his sorrows, Judas now approached him at the head of an armed band, and by a treacherous kiss betrayed him into their hands. Behold then our Divine Master under these accumulated troubles! What might we expect to hear from him on this occasion? Methinks his address to Judas, whose treachery he was aware of, could be no other than that of Paul to Elymas the sorcerer, "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness," art thou come to betray me? But however this address became an Apostle, when zealous
for

for the honour of his Lord, the Saviour himself, when personally interested, saw fit to speak in milder accents, that he might set an example to his followers to "shew all meekness to all men:" "Friend," says he, "wherefore comest thou?" "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?"

We shall consider these remarkable words,

I. In reference to the traitor Judas—

That we may have a just view of the wickedness of Judas, let us notice,

1. The light he resisted—

[He had attended our blessed Lord during the whole course of his Ministry: he had heard all his discourses; and had received from him in private a further exposition of the truths which had been more obscurely delivered to the proud, captious, and malignant auditors that flocked around him. He had seen innumerable and most beneficent miracles wrought in confirmation of the Messiahship of Jesus: so that there could be no doubt upon his mind but that Jesus was "the Son of Man," "the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Had he entertained any secret suspicions that Jesus was an impostor, he would have had some excuse for his treachery: or if he had enjoyed but few opportunities of instruction, his guilt would have been less heinous. Pilate, who was an ignorant Heathen, sinned grievously in not executing strict justice: but the sin of those who had delivered Jesus unto him was incomparably greater^a, because of the superior light which they enjoyed. In this view therefore the sin of Judas was exceeding great.]

2. The obligations he violated—

[Judas was "one of the twelve," who were called to a more intimate acquaintance with our Lord; and was selected from among them to be his purse-bearer and almoner. He had been sent out, like all the other Apostles, to preach the Gospel, and to work miracles in the name of Jesus. He had seen diseases and devils yielding to his word; and had probably been instrumental in converting others to the faith of Christ. How was he bound then to "shew all good fidelity," and to maintain to the uttermost his Master's cause! But besides all this, Jesus within the space of a few hours had acted towards him the part of a menial servant, and had condescended to wash his feet; should not such love have called forth his tenderest and most faithful regards? Moreover, Judas had

on

^a John xix. 11.

on that very occasion pledged himself to die with Jesus rather than *deny* him: yet behold, this man, almost immediately after uttering these words, leaves the room, in order to *betray* his Lord! What impiety was here! If woe was denounced against Chorazin and Bethsaida for not improving the mercies vouchsafed to them, what woes must belong to this unhappy man for violating the strongest obligations which could lie upon him!]

3. The manner in which he violated them—

[Jesus, it should seem, had permitted his Disciples to express their regards to him by the affectionate and endearing token of a kiss: and this was the sign by which Judas undertook to betray him into the hands of his enemies! What horrid perfidy! to make an expression of love and friendship a signal for his apprehension!

But mark the peculiar aggravations with which this perfidy was attended! It was altogether a *voluntary* act. The Chief Priests and Elders could never have entertained a thought of prevailing on one of Christ's own Disciples to betray him: they could expect nothing from them but the most vigorous and determined opposition. Methinks they could scarcely believe their own senses when they heard the traitor Judas making the proposal. If indeed they had seized on Judas, and threatened to put him to extreme torture if he would not further their designs, we might offer some little excuse for him: but who could conceive that the proposal should originate with him, and that he should be a volunteer in such a service?

It was *immediately* after he had received an *express warning* respecting it. Our blessed Lord had but a few hours before told his Disciples that one of them would betray him: and upon being interrogated by each of them, "Lord, is it I?" he told them all that it was the person to whom he should give the sop^b; and told Judas in particular that it was *he*; and that since he was thus bent on the commission of this sin, it would have been better for him that he had never been born^c. Would one not have supposed that such a warning should have diverted him from his purpose? Yet, instead of being checked by it, he went out "*immediately*" under the cover of the night, that he might execute his plot without delay.

We cannot but be astonished *for how small a consideration* he was induced to do this. Had he been promised great riches, sufficient to keep him in opulence and splendor all his days, we should have wondered less at the power of the temptation: but it was only "thirty pieces of silver^d," (the price of a slave,) that he was to receive for his recompence: so little a value did he set upon his Master's life.

The diabolical malignity which he expressed on the occasion, is
a yet

^b John xiii. 26.

^c Matt. xxvi. 21—25.

^d Compare Zech. xi. 12, 13. with Matt. xxvi. 15.

a yet further aggravation of his guilt. When agreeing with the Chief Priests, he gave them a strict charge, "Take him, hold him fast, lead him away safely." As Achitophel, the treacherous friend of David, counselled the rebellious Absalom: "Give me twelve thousand men, and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed, and I will smite the king only¹;" so did Judas respecting the true King of Israel: he reminded the Chief Priests how often he had escaped out of their hands; and, that they might secure him now, he charged them to use the utmost vigilance and circumspection.

Such was the sin of Judas; a sin unparalleled in the annals of the world.]

Let us now extend our views, and consider the text,
II. In reference to traitors of every description—

Though the precise sin which was committed by Judas never was, or will be, committed by any other, yet are there too many who follow his steps, and betray the cause and interests of *their Divine Master*. There are different kinds of traitors:

1. Infidel—

[Many pretend to be followers of Christ, and yet deny every fundamental truth of his religion. The fall of man, and the guilt and corruption consequent upon it; the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ in the place of sinners, and our reconciliation to God by the blood of his cross; the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, together with all the inward life and power of godliness; all these, I say, are denied and held up to ridicule and scorn: and yet the people, who thus expunge from their system almost every doctrine that distinguishes our holy religion, will call themselves Christians. But are they really friends of Christ? Are they not rather enemies, and traitors? Even the followers of Mahomet express as much regard for Christ as they: the Mahometan allows that Christ was a prophet; and what do these infidels allow him more? Truly their kisses are perfidious; their professions are a lie.]

2. Antinomian—

[There are two kinds of Antinomians; systematical, and practical: the former are very zealous for the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, but they carry them to an undue extent; and erase from their system all the obligations of the Moral Law. We hope and believe, that all who embrace this system are not so regardless of the Law in practice, as they are in theory: nevertheless their sentiments are most pernicious; and their professed attachment to Christ is constructive treason.

¹ Matt. xxvi. 48. Mark xiv. 44.

² 2 Sam. xvii. 1, 2.

son. It is certain that, however exemplary some of these persons may be, others (and we fear by far the greater part of them) take encouragement from these licentious tenets to live in sin. If they do not give way to those grosser propensities which would expose their profession to universal contempt, they are at least distinguished by a proud, contentious, worldly spirit, and by irreverence and undue confidence in their transactions with God.

As for practical Antinomians, the great majority of nominal Christians are of this class. They object not to the leading truths of the Gospel: having been educated in the belief of them, they acknowledge them as points which they are not disposed to controvert. But to yield to their influence, and to bring their souls to a state suited to them, they have no mind. They wish for nothing beyond this world: they think of nothing but what relates to the body. Whether their outward conduct be more or less correct, they consider it as of very little importance. Some can run to the greatest excess of riot, being wholly addicted to worldliness or dissipation, and yet account themselves very good Christians. Others, who are restrained from such excesses, can content themselves with "a form of godliness, while they utterly deny its power;" and though they never smite upon their breasts with contrition, never flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy; never devote themselves in earnest to the service of their God; they imagine that all is well, and that they are to be reckoned among the friends and followers of Christ. But their profession serves only to lower Christ in the estimation of the world; and in many instances to fill heathens themselves with an utter abhorrence of his name.

We must acknowledge indeed, that neither the one nor the other of these characters have the malignant designs of Judas: but the ultimate effect of their conduct is to betray him with a kiss.]

3. Hypocritical—

[These come the nearest of all to the character of Judas: and many are there to whom this designation properly belongs. In every age there have been some who have joined themselves to the Church, while yet they felt only transient impressions, and had no root of grace in their hearts. Of them, some cast off all profession of religion, and go back again to the world: others continue their profession, but indulge habits altogether inconsistent with it. Hence they are found deceitful in their words, dishonest in their dealings; and less worthy of confidence than the generality even of avowed worldlings. For a time they wear the mask with success: but at length their

their true character appears; and they make religion "to stink in the nostrils" of all who know them. It is almost superfluous to say that these are traitors: for they not only deliver up Jesus to the scorn and contempt of his professed enemies; but lay a stumbling-block in the way of his friends, and cause many to wax cold in their attachment to Christ, if not also utterly to renounce him. "Woe unto the world because of them! but woe be more especially to those by whom the offence cometh!" In a little time, if they repent not, they will "go to their own place," and participate with Judas the just reward of their deeds.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us not be offended with religion on account of the faults of those who profess it—

[It would manifestly be absurd to make the treachery of Judas a reason for rejecting Christ; for the Scriptures, yea and Christ himself, foretold, that "one who should eat bread with him should lift up his heel against him." And do not the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament declare, that "false brethren should come in," and that "by means of them the way of truth should be evil spoken of?" The very existence therefore of traitors and hypocrites in the Church, is a proof of the truth of our religion; and should confirm, rather than weaken, our attachment to it. If indeed the Gospel gave licence to such characters, that very circumstance would be a just ground for doubting its Divine authority, and withholding from it our approbation: but if it invariably inculcate holiness both in heart and life, then let the blame of hypocrisy rest on those only who are guilty of it; and let the offence that is occasioned by some, be a stimulus to others to adorn the Gospel.]

2. Let us watch against our besetting sin—

[Judas from the very beginning was addicted to covetousness. To gratify this propensity, he took advantage of his office as the purse-bearer to steal from time to time a part of the money intrusted to his care. Had he been told on the first occasion to what this covetous disposition would ultimately lead, how little would he have been able to credit the assertion! But thus it is with sin; it is like a breach in a bank, which, if not stopped at first, will soon be widened by the current, till the whole country be overflowed. When once a man harbours any secret lust, it will gather strength, and gradually obtain an entire ascendant over him. Whatever then be our besetting sin, whether lewdness, or covetousness, or any other, let us watch and pray against it; lest

we

we prove at last a scandal to our profession, and, after having instructed others, ourselves be cast away.]

3. Let us get a real and firm attachment to Jesus Christ—

[There is a sense in which we may say to all of you, “Kiss him, apprehend him, hold him fast.” The Psalmist bids us to “kiss the Son, lest he be angry;” St. Paul speaks of “apprehending that for which he had been apprehended of God in Christ Jesus;” and exhorts us to “lay hold on the hope set before us.” We are commanded also to “cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart.” And should not we be as earnest in this good work as Judas and his band were in their evil work? If they plotted by day, and watched by night, to destroy the Lord Jesus, should we be averse to labour and watchfulness, to obtain an interest in his salvation? Let us get a love to him in our hearts as deeply rooted as their enmity against him was, and we shall account nothing too much to do or suffer for him; nor will the whole world be sufficient to suspend or lessen our fidelity in his service.]

DCCLXXXVII.

CHRIST'S ACCUSATION BEFORE PILATE.

Luke xxiii. 1—3. And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cesar, saying, that he himself is Christ, a king. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the king of the Jews? and he answered him and said, Thou sayest it.

UNANIMITY in any cause is no proof that the cause is good: nothing is requisite but to raise an outcry, and the passions of the multitude are soon heated; and, if there be a few artful and designing men to head them, they will concur in measures the most violent, and in acts the most atrocious. Never was this more awfully exemplified than in the conduct of the Jews towards our blessed Lord. Of all the Benefactors that nation ever beheld, Jesus was by far the greatest: yet here we find the whole multitude of the Jews, with the Priests and Elders at their head, leading Jesus before the Roman Governor,

787.] CHRIST'S ACCUSATION BEFORE PILATE. 687
nor, in order to obtain against him the sentence of death.

We would call your attention to,

I. The transaction itself--

Here are three things to be noticed ;

1. The virulence of the accusation--

[How contemptuously, how maliciously, how falsely, do they speak against him! He *pervert* the nation? Had they called him the Instructor of the Nation, the Healer of the Nation, the Saviour of the Nation, they had done well: but to call him the Perverter of the Nation, was a calumny, which one would have thought his bitterest enemies would not have dared to utter. It was not long since the very question had been publicly submitted to him; and his express answer was, "Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's^a." What he thus enjoined on his followers, he had before sanctioned by his example, having actually wrought a miracle on purpose to pay his tribute^b. And when the people would have taken him to make him a king, he by a miracle rendered himself invisible, and withdrew himself from them^c.]

2. The subtlety of his accusers--

[They formed their accusation so as to influence the person whose decision they desired. Before the High Priest, they accused him of blasphemy; but before Pilate, of sedition; that so they might interest the feelings of each, and procure from both a sentence of condemnation against him. Their pretended zeal for the honour of the Roman Emperor, was especially calculated to make an unfavourable impression on him, who, as Cesar's Deputy, now governed Judea as a province of the Roman Empire.

Their accusation too was founded upon assertions made by our Lord himself. He doubtless had frequently declared that he was the Christ, the King of Israel. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem but four days before, and his approbation of the Hosannas of his followers, amounted to a declaration, that he was the person spoken of by the Prophet, "Behold thy King cometh unto thee, riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass^d."

But did he therefore *pervert* the people, or claim for himself the tribute that was due to Cesar? No: Their premises in a certain sense, were true; but their conclusions from them were utter falsehood. They knew however that logical pre-

cision

^a Luke xx. 22.

^c John vi. 15.

^b Matt. xvii. 25—27.

^d Zech. ix. 9.

cision was not wanted in such a cause: when passion and prejudice guide the judgment, a specious plea will pass for substantial reason, and the semblance of truth will operate as forcibly as truth itself; especially where the accuser espouses the cause of the judge, and the accused is represented as his enemy.]

3. The dignity of the accused—

[He preserved silence in the midst of* all the accusations which were brought against him; “insomuch that *the governor marvelled greatly*.” And well he might marvel, that not a word of anger, or complaint, or self-vindication, should escape him. But Jesus was mute and passive, like a sheep led to the slaughter^f, and “committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”

Nevertheless, when interrogated by his judge, he did answer, yea, and “witnessed a good confession.” Art thou the king of the Jews? saith Pilate. “Thou sayest right,” replied our Lord; “I am.” He would not dissemble, nor for a moment hide such an important truth. He was prepared to endure all consequences, and to yield up his life in the very way that his enemies desired. And, as the Jewish Sanhedrim had already condemned him on his own confession^g, so he was willing that the Roman Governor should follow their example. He was alike unmoved by impatience or revenge, by hopes or fears.]

II. The improvement that should be made of it—

The followers of Christ are called to tread in his steps. Would we then approve ourselves worthy of that high calling? let us,

1. Expect all manner of evil to be spoken of us falsely for his sake—

[He has warned us plainly to expect it^h; and experience proves that we ought to be prepared for it — — — Our enemies will not only take advantage of any thing we say or do, to build malignant reports upon it; but will be sure to impute our conduct to false principles, and to load our principles with consequences not at all deducible from them. We preach salvation by faith only; therefore we are enemies to morality: “We are instant in season and out of season;” and therefore we are irregular, and enemies to the established Church — — — If they would inquire, they would soon find that the very reverse of what they affirm is true: but they desire our con-

* Matt. xxvii. 12.—14.

^f Luke xxii. 71.

^g Isai. liii. 7.

^h Matt. v. 11.

condemnation; and therefore they make up by confidence and clamour, what they want in truth and equity — — — Thus was our Lord himself treated; and "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household!"]¹

2. Submit with meekness to whatever evils we may be called to suffer—

[Our blessed Lord "has suffered, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps." It is true, it is not easy to preserve meekness and resignation amidst all the treatment which we experience from "unreasonable and wicked men:" but we should endeavour to "walk as Christ walked;" and be willing to "be made perfect through sufferings," even as he was. "Let patience then have its perfect work;" and, when led to indulge an impatient spirit, beg of God to strengthen you with all might "by his Spirit in your inward man" — — —]

3. Be stedfast and immoveable in the maintenance of our principles—

[Many occasions may arise wherein we may be tempted to conceal our principles: but it is better to confess them openly, and suffer for them, than to violate our conscience and offend our God. We are expressly commanded "not to fear man, who can only kill the body; but to fear God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell." We do not recommend it to any one to court persecution by a *voluntary* declaration of his principles to those who will only make them grounds of offence; (for that were to "cast pearls before swine;") but whenever *called* to give an account of our faith, let us follow the example of our Lord, and at the risk of our lives "witness a good confession."]

¹ See 1 Kin. xviii. 17. Jer. xxxviii. 4. Est. iii. 8. 9. Acts xvii. 6, 7. & xxiv. 5.

DCCLXXXVIII.

HEROD'S RECONCILIATION WITH PILATE.

Luke xxiii. 12. *And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves.*

IT was truly said of Christ at the time of his birth, that "he should be a Sign that should be spoken against, *that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed:*"

vealed:" for by means of him; throughout all his Ministry, and especially at the close of his life, such depravity was brought to light, as one would scarcely have conceived it possible for man to indulge. To go no further than the immediate context: Pilate had been constrained to declare him innocent; yet, instead of liberating him, had availed himself of the mention of Galilee to send him to Herod, under whose jurisdiction that province was. The Scribes and Pharisees, enraged rather than pacified by Pilate's attestation of his innocence, followed him to Herod's judgment-seat, loading him with all manner of accusations, and making up in vehemence and clamour what they wanted in truth and evidence. Herod, after trying him, was forced to confirm the verdict of Pilate; yet, instead of protecting this persecuted person, arrayed him in mock-majesty, and with his men of war poured contempt upon him, and sent him back again to Pilate as an object worthy only of derision. Thus, while the Scribes and Pharisees unremittingly urged against him their malignant accusations, Pilate and Herod complimented each other at his expense, and made their injuries to him the means of reconciliation between themselves.

From this last circumstance we notice,

I. That sin is a common bond of union among men—

Sin certainly has produced in families and nations the greatest disunion: and generally causes the fiercest animosities among them that are nearest to each other. But it is also true, that sin often forms a bond of union among men.

1. This is true of sin in general—

[The friendships of the world at large originate almost entirely in sin. The gay unite for the indulgence of their pleasures; the licentious, for the gratification of their lusts; the convivial, for the exercise of (what they call) good fellowship: the worldly and ambitious, for the pursuit of wealth or honour;

honour; yea, the very infidels, for the purpose of confirming and propagating their fatal tenets.]

2. It is true of enmity against Christ, in particular—

[Persons who have no other point of contact whatever, are brought together by means of this. The Scribes and Pharisees were far from being friends either to Pilate or Herod; and these two were "at enmity between themselves." Yet behold, how they all agree in persecuting Christ! It had been foretold that they would do so^a; and the history before us is declared to be an accomplishment of that prophecy^b. But how can we account for this? How can we account for that union, which has subsisted in all ages between persons of all ranks, habits, and dispositions, in opposing Christ? It can only be accounted for from hence; that every man has in his own bosom a rooted principle of enmity against Christ; and that he will break down all common rules of propriety in order to give it vent: yea, rather than not have confederates in his opposition to Christ, he will associate himself with the vilest of mankind, and avail himself of *any* help for the suppression or extinction of vital godliness.]

But, however desirable the esteem of our fellow-creatures may be, we must say,

II. That friendships cemented by sin are no objects of envy or congratulation—

Doubtless a reconciliation between any parties that are at variance, is desirable. But it may be purchased at too dear a rate:

1. It was so in the present case—

[Pilate and Herod were appealed to as judges; and, when they found the accused person innocent, they should have rescued him out of the hands of his oppressors. It was no fit occasion for paying compliments to each other, when the life of an innocent person was at stake; nor were they at liberty to sport with such sacred interests. And what was the natural effect of this solemn trifling? What, but to encourage each other in sin; to harden each other in impenitence; and to aggravate each other's eternal condemnation? Say now, whether a friendship so formed could afford any solid satisfaction to their minds? Say, whether it would not have been better for Herod to have continued at enmity with Pilate, and even to have subjected *himself* to all manner of indignities for espousing

^a Ps. ii. 1, 2.

^b Acts iv. 25—28.

espousing the cause of Jesus, than to have brought such guilt upon his soul for the sake of gratifying a fellow-worm?]

2. It is so, whenever we sacrifice a good conscience in order to obtain it—

[We may conciliate the favour of men, by “putting our light under a bushel,” and conforming to the maxims and habits of the world. We may make “the world love us, by becoming of the world.” Probably many, who would have condemned Demas for continuing faithful to his high calling, commended him when they found that he had relinquished it together with the society of the Lord’s people. But what do *we* think of his conduct? or what does he himself think of it now? Has he not learned long since, that the purchase of the whole world at the expense of the soul is an unprofitable bargain? Have not many apostates borne testimony to that effect, even while they have been yet in possession of the things they coveted? Yes; many would gladly have restored, like Judas, their ill-acquired wealth or honour, if they could but regain the peace of mind which they have lost. Know then, that the testimony of a good conscience is the first of blessings; and nothing, not even life itself, is to be desired, unless in perfect consistency with that.]

CONCLUSION :

1. Let us not be surprised if there be confederacies against *us*—

[As long as there continues in the hearts of unregenerate men a principle of enmity against God, we must expect it to operate as it ever has done, and to combine against us all the powers of the world. When the Gibeonites made a covenant with Joshua, all the kingdoms of Canaan confederated to destroy them. Let not us think that the world will be at peace with us, if we unite ourselves to the Lord Jesus. “The servant cannot be greater than his Lord.” When therefore we suffer like indignities with him, let us not account it hard, but rather rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake.]

2. Let a principle of faith and love unite and animate *us*—

[We blame not the union of Herod and Pilate, but their union in a bad cause. We have a cause in which it will be our honour to unite; and a principle, which, if truly operative in our souls, will combine us all in the prosecution of the noblest ends. See what an union was produced among
the

the converts on the day of Pentecost^d. O that the Holy Ghost might descend on us also, and that we might be all of one heart and one mind in the service of our God! Then shall we exemplify the change which Divine grace effects, and glorify him who endured such indignities for us.]

^d Acts ii. 41—47.

DCCLXXXIX.

BARABBAS SPARED AND CHRIST CONDEMNED.

Luke xxiii. 13—25. *And Pilate, when he had called together the Chief Priests and the Rulers of the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people; and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him: and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto^a him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him: (for of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: (who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast in prison.) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the Chief Priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.*

THE Prophets enter very minutely into the subject of Christ's sufferings, in order that, instead of being led by them to doubt the truth of his Messiahship, we might see in them a demonstration that he was the very person to whom the prophecies referred. But it is not in this view only that we should dwell upon this mysterious subject: many other, and most important, ends are to be answered by the contemplation of his sufferings. We see in them

^a The marginal Translation, "by him," is far preferable.

them his unparalleled love to us: we see also the desert of sin; and the trials which all his followers must, in a greater or less degree, be called to endure. That part of them which we are now to consider is, his condemnation at the bar of Pilate. Let us notice,

I. The circumstances of his condemnation—

There are three mentioned in our text; and to these we will confine our attention:

1. Pilate's testimony respecting him—

[God so ordered it, that every person who was active in putting our Lord to death, should either directly or indirectly attest his innocence. We forbear to adduce other instances; such as that of Judas, or the dying thief; or the Centurion; because in the passage before us we have ample scope for illustrating the observation. Pilate here tells the whole assembly of the Jews, that he had examined Jesus, that he had examined him in their presence, and had inquired into all their allegations against him; and that, after the most careful investigation, he could not find that Jesus had been guilty of any one of those things laid to his charge. He then tells them, that he had sent both the prisoner and his accusers to Herod, who being governor of Galilee, where the crimes were said to have been committed, had the greater right to take cognizance of them; and, being a Jew, must be supposed to be more competent to judge of them, as being more conversant with the Jewish laws and customs than he could pretend to be: but that neither could Herod find in him any crime worthy of death. When he found that these united attestations did not satisfy them, he repeated a second and a third time his declarations, that Jesus was innocent: and he appealed to the whole multitude of his accusers, whether any of them could substantiate so much as one single charge against him. This they answered only by clamours: and thus unwittingly confessed, that they were unable in any single instance to prove their point—— Thus all, both accusers and judges, confessed, that though he was to be “cut off, it was *not for himself*,” or, in other words, that “he was the true Messiah^b.”]

2. His ineffectual attempts to save him—

[Pilate, being convinced of the innocence of Jesus, was very averse to condemn him: yet being afraid of offending the Jews, he did not dare to acquit him. Upon the mention
of

^b Dan. ix. 26.

of Galilee therefore, he was glad to get rid of the matter altogether, and to send the parties to Herod, to be judged by him. When this expedient failed, he tried to pacify the people, by offering to inflict on Jesus the milder punishment of scourging; (though he had no right to punish in that manner a person whom he knew to be innocent;) but this would not satisfy them: they thirsted for his blood; and would be satisfied with nothing less. Perceiving that the Chief Priests and Elders were the chief instigators of the people, he tried to secure his object by putting the matter entirely into the hands of the people; amongst whom he supposed Jesus must have many friends. Accordingly he reminded them of a privilege, which by the courtesy of the Roman government they enjoyed, of having one criminal liberated at their request; and, that there might be no comparison at all between the persons presented to their choice, he gave them the option of liberating Jesus, or a noted robber, rebel, and murderer, named Barabbas. This however, through the influence of the priests, succeeded no better than the former devices. He therefore resorted to one more contrivance. He thought that the people would feel themselves highly honoured if they might on this occasion have their privilege extended to the liberating of two instead of one; and therefore, without expressing it in plain terms, he intimates to them, that if they chose to ask it, he would readily grant their request in favour of Jesus too: "What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ?" But all was to no purpose: they were bent upon destroying Jesus, and would listen to no proposal in his favour—— In their pertinacity however, we see, that though they were free agents, and criminal in the highest degree, they did only what was from eternity fixed in "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God^d."]

3. His surrender of him to the will of his enemies —

[In proportion as Pilate wavered, the people became more urgent: and they would at last take no denial. Seeing therefore his efforts of no avail, he set the murderer, Barabbas, at liberty, and gave up Jesus into their hands; first, to be scourged, (in hopes that their pity might be moved, when they should see "great furrows ploughed upon his back,") and then to suffer death upon the cross.

Satan, methinks, exulted now in having accomplished the final destruction of Jesus: but little did he imagine, that, whilst he was thus "bruising the heel" of the Messiah, his own head should receive a deadly blow, that he should never to

^c Matt. xxvii. 22.

^d Acts ii. 23. & iv. 28.

to all eternity recover^e: and that the Messiah's kingdom should be immovably established, by the very means used to root it out from the earth^f.]

We now pass on to suggest,

II. Some reflections suited to the occasion—

Amongst the multitude of thoughts which such a subject must bring to the mind, we will fix on two or three of the most important:

1. How awful is the depravity of the human heart!

[This we can see in reference to the Jews: but we make a very defective improvement of Scripture history, if we do not use it as a glass wherein to see human nature in general, and our own hearts in particular.

What was the principle by which the Priests and Elders were actuated on this occasion? It was *envy*: "He knew that for *envy* they had delivered him." And is not that principle in our hearts? Are we not told that "the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy." Have Cain, and Ishmael, and Joseph's Brethren, none resembling them amongst us? It is true, that men are less conscious of that principle than perhaps of any other: but this arises from its so blackening the characters of those who are exposed to its malignant shafts, as to make them appear deserving of all the evil that it inflicts upon them. But though we see not this principle in ourselves, we discover it easily enough in others; and are constrained to confess its odiousness.

And, as the same principle exists in us, so, if Jesus Christ were now to come into the world again, and demean himself precisely in the same manner as he did before, he would excite the same inveterate hatred in us as he did in them. Suppose a poor man laying open the pride, the worldliness, the hypocrisy of all ranks of people, as well among the Clergy as the Laity, and drawing myriads after him from every quarter of the land; would this provoke no enmity: would it beget no murderous rancour in the hearts of those whose hypocrisy was detected, and whose influence was destroyed?

We may go further, and ask, Whether the same impious choice be not made at this day as in the days of old? What is the preferring of the ungodly to the godly, and sin to holiness, but a preferring of Barabbas to Christ? Yes; and so common is this, that the generality of the world would rather be seen in public with a known rake or infidel; than with a man eminent for piety and godly zeal — — —

Behold then, I say, the human heart in general, and your own in particular; and whilst you justly wonder at the impiety
of

of the Jews, learn no less to wonder at, and deplore, your own.]

2. How dangerous an evil is indecision !

[Had Pilate determined to execute justice without regard to consequences, he had never crucified the Lord of glory: but when he listened to the fear of man, and sought to please the Jews, he made a snare for his own feet: he encouraged the importunity which he should have silenced at first, and sacrificed his conscience to a desire of popularity. Unhappy man! what guilt did he contract, and what misery did he treasure up for himself by his want of resolution^s!

Thus it is also amongst us. We hear Christ and his religion vilified, and are afraid to defend them. We see wickedness practised, and are afraid to testify against it. To avoid the ridicule or displeasure of others, we are led into compliances which our conscience disapproves. In short, we are carried oftentimes from one sin to another, through a want of firmness to withstand the tide of fashion and custom. But, Brethren, we shall have reason to deplore timidity infinitely more than any consequences which an adherence to duty can ever entail upon us. We all see what Pilate should have done. He should have said, 'I am a judge, and I must decide according to law.' Thus should we say: 'I am a Christian; and I must act according to the Gospel: *that* is my directory; and nothing shall tempt me to depart from it: as for clamour, I regard it not: applause or censure are alike indifferent to me. If God call me to perform a duty, and all the world combine to make me swerve from it, my answer to them is, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye:" if I seek to please men, I cannot be the servant of Jesus Christ.' I mean not that you are to be thus rigid in matters of indifference: but in matters of plain duty, you must "resist unto blood," and embrace death rather than make shipwreck of a good conscience^b.]

^s Acts iii. 13—15. & iv. 27. with Ps. ii. 2, 9.

^b If a third reflection be wanted, it may stand thus: 3. How reasonable is it that we should submit to sufferings for Christ's sake! and then, after representing his submission here manifested, such passages as 1 Pet. ii. 19—24. & iv. 12—16. may be cited to shew, that in suffering for him (provided it be "wrongfully,") we have reason to rejoice, and to account it our highest honour. But this subject occurs elsewhere.

DCCXC.

CHRIST'S ADDRESS TO THE WOMEN WHO LAMENTED HIM.

Luke xxiii. 27—31. *And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.*

him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these thing in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

ON a cursory view of the subject, it might be thought, that the enemies of Jesus, after having secured their chief object, began to relent; since, instead of obliging him in his debilitated state to bear his cross to the place of execution, (as was customary on such occasions,) they compelled another person to carry it for him. This however was only an additional instance of their malignity. They saw that, in consequence of his watching, and fasting, and diversified sufferings, he was ready to faint; and they began to fear, that he would die before he should reach the place; and consequently that they would be deprived of the satisfaction of making him a public spectacle upon the cross. Hence they spared him this fatigue, that he might be the more capable of suffering all the other miseries which they were about to inflict upon him. Far different was the disposition of Jesus towards them. This short interval he improved for the good of those who were around him. He saw many, and especially some women, making bitter lamentation on his account: and these he exhorted not to weep on his account, but on account of themselves and their children; since the evils reserved for them were both in extent and duration far more terrible than those which he now experienced.

In discoursing upon his words to them, we shall,

I. Explain his counsel—

[It is possible, that some of those whom he addressed were moved to pity him merely from a natural sense of humanity; whilst others were influenced both by faith and love. At all events, we are sure that he did not mean to forbid the exercise of sympathy and compassion; since it was his desire, that these amiable qualities should characterize his followers in all ages. Love, in all its branches, was not only enjoined
by

by him, but was distinguished by him as *his* commandment, which he imposed on all who professed themselves his Disciples*: from whence St. Paul calls it "*the law of Christ*;" "bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^b."

The prohibition was rather of a comparative kind; similar to that expression of the Prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" where sacrifice is not intended to be prohibited, but only to give way, when it should stand in competition with the exercise of mercy.

In this view there was abundant reason for the counsel which Christ now gave them. With respect to himself, they had no such great occasion to weep, because his sufferings were altogether voluntary; they were also now very near their termination; and they would issue both in his own exaltation to the right hand of God, and in the salvation of a ruined world. Hence, if rightly considered, his afflictions, though so exceeding grievous, were grounds rather of gratitude and joy than of regret and sorrow. But the afflictions which in due time would come on them would be such as had not existed from the foundation of the world, nor ever would be equalled to the end of time. Happy as the Jewish women accounted themselves in having children, they would then congratulate "the barren:" and, desirous as men naturally are of life, they would wish even "rocks and mountains to fall upon them," to put them out of their misery.

This prediction our blessed Lord confirms by a kind of proverb, in which he appeals to the very judgment of those whom he addressed: 'You see,' says he, 'what they are doing to me, who have never given any just occasion of offence: judge then what shall be done to them, when they have filled up the measure of their iniquities, and rendered themselves, like dry wood, proper fuel for the wrath of God?'

These then were the subjects to which he endeavoured to turn their minds, not so much for the purpose of augmenting their sorrow, as of giving it a right direction, and rendering it subservient to their eternal good; for, in proportion as they anticipated the judgments that awaited that wicked generation, they would become penitent themselves, and encourage penitence in others; and thus become instrumental in saving some who were now hardened in their iniquities.]

Having thus explained our Lord's counsel to the lamenting women, we proceed to,

II. Engraft some further counsel upon it—

We might draw your attention to the example of
Christ,

* John xv. 12.

^b Gal. vi. 2.

Christ, who even in this hour of his deepest sorrows forgot, as it were, his own personal concerns, and was mindful only of the concerns of others^c. But we shall rather keep in view the subject matter of his address : in reference to which we would say,

1. Get your hearts impressed with the sufferings of Christ—

[We have before observed, that our Lord did not mean to forbid this, but only to recommend in preference some other considerations, which, under their circumstances, were of more importance. It is true, that under any circumstances, the being affected with the relation of our Lord's sufferings, just in the same way that we should be with any tragical story, will be of little avail. It is not such an impression therefore that we are anxious to produce. We wish you to consider, what was *the end* of those sufferings; and to behold in them, as in a mirror, your desert and danger, your hope and deliverance. Yes; you will do well to contemplate them in this view, till you weep and smite upon your breasts with even greater anguish than his compassionate attendants ever felt. This is the duty of every one amongst us; according to that declaration of the Prophet, "They shall look on him whom they pierced, and shall mourn as one mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born^d." Indeed, to attain this state of mind, should be the greatest object of our lives; since without it we can have no interest in him; and with it we can never perish. A humble, contrite, and believing view of Christ will infallibly transform us into his image, and bring us to the possession of his glory^e.]

2. Contemplate the probable issue of sin, even in this life—

[It is in the future world that sin will receive its full reward. But it not unfrequently receives a tremendous recompence even here. How many have their health impaired, their fortunes injured, their reputation blasted, and their peace destroyed, by their own folly and wickedness! How many mothers have lived to see the child, which they once fondled with the tenderest affection, become a source of unutterable grief; insomuch that they have envied the wombs that never bare! And how many have so embittered their lives, that they have wished for death, and would have been glad to have a rock or mountain to crush them to atoms! There

^c Phil. ii. 4.

^d Zech. xii. 10.

^e 2 Cor. iii. 18. - John vi. 40.

There is not a town, or scarcely a village, that will not afford some instances of persons, who, from having ruined their health, their reputation, their fortune, or their peace, do not wish that they had never been born. What is it that makes suicide so common? You will almost invariably trace it to this source: the person's sins have made him so miserable, that life itself is become a burthen to him: so true is that repeated declaration of the Prophet, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest; whose waters cast up mire and dirt: there is no peace, saith God, to the wicked."¹

Such are the means by which God often punishes sin in this life. Not unfrequently it happens that the partners of our guilt are made the instruments of our punishment. Thus, in the history before us, the Romans were employed by the Jews in putting Jesus to death; and they were afterwards employed by God in punishing that whole nation, to an extent unparalleled in the annals of the world. Thus also it is often found, that those who have administered to our fraudulent gains or licentious pleasures, are the very persons through whom God visits our iniquity upon us.

Let then the connexion between sin and misery be considered: and learn, that in holiness alone is pleasure to be found without alloy.]

3. Look forward with awe to the future judgment—

[If the Jewish matrons were bidden to weep for themselves and their children, on account of the calamities that should be endured in the siege of Jerusalem, much more may every thoughtful person weep in the prospect of that day, when all shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. Then shall every man be recompensed according to his works. How they who have made light of sin in this world will feel in that day, we are informed by God himself; who assures us, that sinners of every rank, from the highest to the lowest, will "cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb."² The inference which our Lord draws from his own sufferings, in reference to the Jewish nation, may with equal propriety be drawn from his people's sufferings in reference to the world at large. They are, in their measure, persecuted like him? and "if these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If judgment begin at the house of God," says the Apostle, "what must the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?"³ If those who are comparatively as "a green tree" are afflicted by God for *the purging* of their sins, what must not they expect, who, like "a dry tree," are prepared for *the punishment* of their sins? Doubtless their

misery

¹ Isai. lvj. 20, 21.

² Rev. vi. 15—17.

³ 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18.

misery will be inconceivably great, insomuch that they will curse their very existence, and wish that by any means they could bring it to a termination¹.

Brethren, know assuredly, that that day will come; and that repentance then will be too late. Then, not they only who crucified the Lord Jesus must give account of themselves to God, but those also who have "crucified him afresh" by continuing in sin². Prepare ye then for that great account; and beg of God, that "when he shall appear, ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless³."

¹ Rev. ix. 6.

² Heb. vi. 6:

³ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

DCCXCI.

THE EFFECT OF CHRIST'S DEATH ON THE BEHOLDERS.

Luke xxiii. 47, 48: Now when the Centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

RAPID are the revolutions of the human mind: like the sea, it is easily agitated by every gust of wind, and driven with violence in whatever direction it may happen to be impelled. God has given us reason; to guide us and to keep us fixed to our purpose; but we are slaves to passion, and yield ourselves willing instruments of all who have skill and inclination to move us. We have a striking instance of this fluctuating disposition in the Jewish populace: they had been so impressed with the wonders which Jesus had wrought in confirmation of his Divine Mission, that they all followed him with acclamations and hosannahs into Jerusalem: but by the artifices of the Chief Priests and Rulers, they were, in the space of three days, made as clamorous against him, all of them demanding, as with one voice, that he should be crucified. Scarcely however had they prevailed, but another change took place in their minds; and they were as sorry at seeing what they had accomplished, as they had just before been eager to accomplish it.

Let us consider,

I. The

I. The effects which Christ's death produced on the beholders—

The execution of criminals is of itself calculated to impress the mind with pity for the sufferers, and to evince the evil of those crimes for which they suffer: but the crucifixion of our Lord drew the attention of the spectators to their own state, and led them to contemplate their own guilt and danger in being accessory to it. Observe the effect it produced,

1. On the multitude—

[The Chief Priests and Rulers, it should seem, were not at all affected with it. Their envy, their pride, their resentment had taken too deep a root within them, to suffer them to listen for a moment to the voice of conscience: but the multitude, who were mere instruments of their rage, began to consider what they had done. The three hours of darkness had given them time for reflection: the recollection of all that Christ had done for their nation, led them to consider what return they had now made him for all his unparalleled kindness; and the earthquake convinced them that they were in the hands of an angry God. Now therefore they began to express their regret and sorrow at having lent their aid to so cruel a deed, so wicked a conspiracy. Now they shewed that sin has a far different aspect when committed, from what it had previous to the commission of it. Even Judas, when he saw what was likely to be the consequence of his treachery, was filled with compunction, and would have gladly reversed the deed to which his covetousness had impelled him. So these now wished that they had not yielded to the instigations of their Rulers, or suffered themselves to participate in so foul a crime — — — How far their repentance was genuine, we are not able to say: though we think it probable that numbers of them were amongst the converts on the day of Pentecost: but of this we are sure, that sin, of whatever kind, when once it is viewed aright, will cause us to "smite our breasts" with anguish, and to forsake the company of those who hold fast their transgressions: and that, if this effect be not produced upon us now, we shall "weep and wail and gnash our teeth" with unavailing sorrows to all eternity.]

2. On the Centurion—

[He, and those whom he commanded, had attended there, not so much from choice as from necessity: accordingly we find both in him and them a mind more open to conviction:

conviction : for they, though Heathens, became the advocates of HIM, whom his own nation had rejected and abhorred. The miraculous signs attendant on the death of Christ, together with the whole conduct of that righteous sufferer, and the peculiar manner in which he resigned his life, evincing indisputably that it was not taken away from him, but that he surrendered it voluntarily into his Father's hands ; all this together convinced the Centurion, that Jesus was the very person whom he had professed himself to be. Hence, in the hearing of all around him, he exclaimed, "Certainly this was a righteous man," "Truly this was the Son of God^a." There were two grounds on which Jesus had been put to death ; the one was, that he was a *blasphemer*, for making himself the Son of God ; the other was, that he was a *Rebel* against Cesar, for making himself a king. In opposition to both of these accusations the Centurion affirms, that he was no rebel, but "a righteous man ;" and that he was no blasphemer, but, "the very Son of God." Thus, whilst the Jews were pouring contempt on God, the Centurion "glorified him ;" and, whilst they hardened their hearts against him, he and his fellow-soldiers "feared greatly." What a blessed earnest was this of the conversion of the Gentiles ! and what a reproof is this to us, who can hear of these transactions without any emotion, and neglect that Saviour whom he acknowledged ! — — —]

From the effects of Christ's death on the beholders, let us proceed to notice,

II. The reflections it suggests to us—

Amongst the numberless considerations which naturally arise from this subject, we will select such only as have not been anticipated under any other view of our Lord's sufferings, and only two or three of them. Observe then from hence,

1. That the best of causes may be violently opposed—

[If we were speaking to Jews, we should have need to prove the excellence of Christianity ; but to a Christian assembly, it is scarcely necessary to prove that the cause of Christ is the best of all causes. We see in the Gospel the most stupendous display of God's wisdom and love ; a plan for the saving of a ruined world, and for restoring men to the Divine favour, through the mediation and intercession of God's only-begotten Son. We see, or at least profess to see, how

^a Compare Matt. xxvii. 54.

how suited it is to our necessities, and how sufficient for our wants: and, if we are Christians indeed, we know by sweet experience that it is an inexhaustible source of peace and joy, of righteousness and true holiness. Yet with what vehemence was it opposed at its first establishment! Not all the wisdom and innocence of Jesus, nor all the benevolent miracles that he wrought, could disarm his enemies: though "they hated him without a cause," they hated him unto death. In like manner they persecuted unto death his chosen Messengers, and myriads of his faithful people: yet, in the review of all which was done to stop the progress of his religion, we Christians do not hesitate to affirm that his cause was good; and whilst we execrate the memory of his opposers, we canonize his followers as saints and martyrs.

But what is the treatment which his cause meets with at this hour? Is there not the same hostility against it, though the exercise of that hostility is moderated by the laws under which we live? People indeed will pretend that the cause which they oppose, is not the cause of Christ; just as the Jews denied that they were opposing the cause of God, and even pretended to be actuated by zeal for God: but as *they* opposed the holy Scriptures, so do modern persecutors; and in so doing they both fulfil the Scriptures, and unwittingly confirm the very truths they oppose. Whatever misrepresentations therefore men may adduce to vilify the truths and people of God, the religion of Christ is the same as it ever was; nor does the contempt poured upon it diminish in the least degree the respect in which it should be held. We must not think the worse of the Gospel because it is despised, but must weigh it in the balance of the sanctuary, and estimate it by its own intrinsic worth.]

2. That the cause of Christ will ultimately triumph—

[The Chief Priests and Rulers congratulated themselves on their success, when they saw the despised Nazarene entombed. But behold, the breath had scarcely departed from his body before his triumphs began; so true is that saying of the Apostle, "He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them on his cross^b." The whole multitude who attended his crucifixion, smote their breasts with penitential sorrow; and the Centurion who presided at his execution, confessed him in the presence of his murderers! Thus early were the first-fruits of the Gospel reaped: and speedily afterwards followed an abundant harvest. The Resurrection and Ascension of Christ proved to his enemies how vain were all their efforts

against

^b Col. ii. 15.

against him: and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost gathered thousands to his standard in one day. From that time his religion spread throughout Judea and the whole Roman empire; and we, at this distant place and period, are witnesses for him that his cause has triumphed, and that it shall finally prevail throughout all the earth. God had set the world at defiance; and had pronounced obedience to the Gospel to be the true wisdom of every man, of kings and governors, as well as of the lowest classes of society: and, agreeably to his predictions, "the stone which the builders disallowed, is become the head of the corner." Let men then continue to oppose the Gospel as they will, it shall "run and be glorified, and fill the face of the whole earth with fruit;" it is a rock that defies all the power or policy of hell itself: and, as "all who fall upon it shall be broken, so, on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

Happy would it be if the enemies of Christ would avail themselves of the space allowed them for reflection, and would consider what an unequal contest they are endeavouring to maintain! They think that they are fighting against a few weak enthusiasts; but they are "fighting against God" himself, who, in the person of his Son, addresses them, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" The Lord grant that the admonition given on that occasion to that bitter persecutor, may be remembered by us all; "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks!"

3. That the proper effect of his death is to produce penitence and faith in all—

[We see the propriety of their conduct who smote their breasts, and publicly professed their faith in Christ: we even congratulate them in our minds on their speedy experience of such a blessed change. But was this conduct proper in them only? is there no occasion for similar emotions amongst us? Perhaps, instead of opposing, we approve and profess the Gospel: but who amongst us has not opposed the establishment of Christ's kingdom in his own heart? Though we did not unite with those who crucified him on Mount Calvary, have we not "crucified him afresh," by continuing in sin? Truly there is even more cause for us to "smite our breasts," than there was for that multitude to do so: for they sinned "through ignorance;" "they knew not what they did:" but we sin against light and knowledge, yea, against our own most solemn vows of allegiance to him. The smallest knowledge of our own hearts will furnish us with a catalogue of sins that we have committed against him, a catalogue that would reach up

up to heaven. This then I say; Let us imitate the penitent multitude and the believing Centurion: and in this especially let us imitate them, in not moving from the place where we are, without first abasing ourselves before God for the guilt we have contracted, and looking unto Jesus for the expiation of it. Doubtless the change that took place in them, was wrought by the agency of the Holy Spirit, whose office is "to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and shew them unto us." That Spirit is promised "to us, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Let us then pray for the influences of that same Spirit upon our hearts; that, through his powerful operations, we may "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born^d."]

^d Zech. xii. 10.

DCCXCII.

THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS AND EXALTATION.

Luke xxiv. 26. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*

AN ignorance of the Scriptures is far more injurious to us than we are apt to imagine; for it lies at the root of all our errors both in faith and practice. The infidels of old denied the doctrine of the resurrection, "not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God." The Jewish Rulers crucified their Messiah, because they were ignorant of the character in which, according to the Scriptures, he was to appear; and thus they unwittingly fulfilled the very Scriptures which they professed to reverence. The Disciples of our Lord himself were confounded at the death of their Master, and averse to credit the reports of his resurrection, because "they knew not the Scriptures that he must rise again." Our blessed Lord, after his resurrection, joined two of them in their way to Emmaus; and when he found how ignorant and incredulous they were, he reproved them; and, to convince them that "the Messiah *ought* to have suffered the very things which he had suffered, and in that

that way to enter into his glory," he expounded to them the principal prophecies relating to those events.

His appeal to them on that occasion leads us to consider,

I. The necessity of Christ's sufferings unto death—

There was no necessity for Christ to undertake the redemption of man; but, supposing him to have undertaken it, then there was a necessity for his sufferings unto death;

1. To fulfil the Scriptures—

[The death of Christ had been exhibited in *types* from the very beginning: all the sacrifices offered by Adam, Abel, Noah, and the Jews themselves, marked out a suffering Messiah. The same also was declared in many express *prophecies*. Not to mention the intimation of it given in the first prophecy^a, nothing could be more plain than the declarations of Isaiah on this subject^b: it seems perfectly astonishing to us, that people professing to regard his writings as prophecies of the Messiah, should ever make the crucifixion of Christ a stumbling-block, or account the doctrine of his cross foolishness. How decisive too is the testimony of Daniel^c; as is that also of Zechariah^d! But besides these general testimonies, there are particular intimations respecting all the most minute circumstances of his death: the collective view of which forms a body of evidence that is altogether irresistible.

But how could these be fulfilled if Jesus should not suffer? they must all be rendered null and void, and the veracity of the Inspired Writers, yea, of Him also who inspired them, must be for ever impeached.]

2. To answer the ends of his Mission—

[For what did Jesus come into the world? Was it not to bear the sins of men in his own body, and, by rendering satisfaction to God, to make the exercise of mercy compatible with the rights of truth and justice? But how were these ends to be attained? The obedience of Jesus, however perfect, could not answer these ends. The Law denounced death against the transgressor: and death must be inflicted on him, or on his Surety. If therefore Jesus was to be a Surety for man, he must undergo death; he must bear that which man should have borne: nothing but this could satisfy the demands of the Law: and if man were saved without the death of his Surety,

^a Gen. iii. 15.

^c Dan. ix. 26.

^b Isai. lii. 14. & liii. 3—5.

^d Zech. xiii. 7.

Surety, the whole authority of the Law must be cancelled, and the Lawgiver himself be dishonoured in the sight of all his creatures. We grant, for argument sake, that the mercy of God would be magnified in such a way of pardoning transgression: But then what regard would he shew for the rights of justice? What would become of his truth and faithfulness? How could "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other?" The perfections of God would be set at variance, and some would triumph at the expense of others: but this would be directly contrary to the ends of Christ's Mission: and therefore our Divine Surety must suffer death, in order to answer the ends for which he became incarnate.]

With the death of Christ is connected,

II. The necessity of his exaltation to glory—

The two cannot be separated: there was a necessity that the latter should take place,

1. To complete his work—

[The work of the High Priest was not finished, when he had shed the blood of his sacrifice: he must carry that blood within the veil, and sprinkle it upon, and before, the mercy-seat: and he must then burn incense before the mercy-seat: nor, till this was accomplished, could he come out to bless the people. Thus must our great High Priest not only offer himself a Sacrifice, but "enter into heaven with his own blood;" and, together with that, present also the incense of his own intercession. If he should not do this, he would leave his work unfinished, and consequently of no avail. But how should he do this, if he should not "enter into his glory?" Nor is it his priestly office only that would be made void; his prophetic and kingly offices also would be incomplete: he teaches men by his Spirit; but "the Holy Ghost would not have been given, if Jesus had not been glorified:" it was necessary that he should go into heaven, that he might send the Spirit down from thence^e. Nor could he exercise his kingly government unless he were enthroned on high, and invested with power to subdue all things unto himself^h. Hence then his exaltation was as necessary to the completion of his work, as his humiliation was to its commencement.]

2. To give to his people a solid ground of hope—

[If our Surety, who had been carried to prison for our debt, were kept immured in it, we should have reason to fear that he was unable to fulfil his engagements: but if we saw him

^a Heb. ix. 12, 24.

^f John vii. 39.

^e John xvi. 7:

^h Phil. ii. 9—11. "God exalted Him, that every knee should bow," &c.

him liberated, we should conclude that he had fully discharged our debt. Thus if our blessed Lord had never been exalted to heaven to enjoy "*his* glory," which he possessed previous to his incarnation, we should feel many misgiving thoughts respecting the acceptance of his Sacrifice, and the efficacy of his Mediation. But when he is restored to that glory which for our sakes he had laid aside, we cannot entertain a doubt respecting his sufficiency for our full and complete salvation. Though by dying on the cross he appeared unable to save himself, yet, by ascending to heaven afterwards, we are assured of his power to save us: because he raised up himself, we know he can raise up us; and, "because he liveth, we trust assuredly that we shall live also." Nor are we left to conclude this from uncertain reasonings; for St. Peter expressly tells us, that "God raised him up and *gave him glory* that our faith and hope might be in God."

To obtain a just view of our Lord's address, it will be proper to notice,

III. The peculiar force of his appeal—

There is a very striking energy in the text, as connected with the preceding and following verses: it intimated,

1. That they ought to have been better acquainted with the Scriptures—

[The Jews had the Sacred Oracles read and expounded to them every Sabbath-day; and therefore they were inexcusable in not being well acquainted with their contents, especially with those great truths which related to their Messiah. And the Apostles, above all, were blame-worthy, because they had enjoyed the Ministry of our Lord himself. How blameable then are we, if we are ignorant of that which relates to Christ; we, who have all the light of the New Testament as well as of the Old; we, who can compare the prophecies with the history of their accomplishment; we, to whom the Bible is accessible at all times; and who have its contents statedly and plainly opened to us! We are apt to think our ignorance of the Scriptures excusable, because we are not scholars, or because we must attend to our worldly callings: but the Disciples were poor fishermen, and therefore as excusable as any persons upon those grounds; yet our Lord justly and severely reproved their ignorance: and most assuredly he will reprove us also in the day of judgment, for not using better the means of instruction which he has afforded us, unless we search the Scriptures, and labour diligently

diligently to acquaint ourselves with the things belonging to our peace.]

2. That the Scriptures, whether men be acquainted with them or not, shall surely be fulfilled—

[The Scriptures had foretold the sufferings, and the consequent glory, of the Messiah; and therefore it ought not to have been a matter of surprise that the events had corresponded with the predictions. Thus every thing relating to men's acceptance or rejection of the Messiah, is foretold; and, whatever they may think to the contrary, every jot and tittle of it shall be accomplished. The eternal sufferings of the impenitent and unbelieving, may appear as improbable as the sufferings of the Messiah: and the eternal happiness of the contrite and believing, may seem as unlikely as the exaltation of Jesus, who was crucified: but, in matters that are revealed, we must not reckon upon probabilities or improbabilities: whatever is foretold, is as certain as the power and veracity of God can make it. They who look to our once crucified, but now exalted, Saviour, and make him the sole ground of their hope and confidence, are as sure of being in heaven as if they were already there, provided they continue to exercise faith on him, and shew forth their faith by their works. They, on the contrary, who neglect the Saviour, or make any thing of their own the ground of their confidence, are as sure of everlasting misery as if they were already enduring it in hell, unless they repent, and embrace the Saviour with their whole hearts. That which "*ought*" to be, according to the Scriptures, *shall* be: neither the fears of the timid, nor the presumption of the bold, shall at all change the decrees of heaven: yea rather, the agents, whether men or devils, who most labour to counteract the will of God, shall be taken in their own craftiness, and be the active, though unsuspecting, instruments of accomplishing his designs.]

INFER,

1. How awful must have been the state of man that such things should be necessary for his recovery!

[Inexpressibly dreadful must have been that guilt which required the sufferings of God's only dear Son to expiate it; and most deplorable that helplessness which could not be remedied but by his consequent exaltation to glory. We may judge of the state of man by that to which the fallen angels are reduced. There would have been no difference between them and us to all eternity, if Jesus had not undertaken

taken for us. And such indeed is the state of those who are not interested in the Saviour: for, as far as respects their happiness, it is the same thing not to have a Saviour, and not to be interested in the Saviour that there is; only indeed their guilt is awfully increased by their contempt of him. Think then of this, ye who neglect the Saviour: as far as respects any hope of mercy, ye are in the condition of the fallen angels, while ye continue to neglect him: but, as to your final doom, you must perish under the aggravated guilt of rejecting and contemning your incarnate God. O that you may consider this, and "flee for refuge to the hope set before you!"]

2. How blessed is the state of those who are interested in the Saviour!

[Guilty and helpless as you are in yourselves, you have no need to despond when you reflect on what has been done for your salvation. Supposing that you would be restored to the favour of God, what can you think of that "*ought*" to be done, either for God's honour or for your security, which has not already been done for you? Would you have a Surety? There is one. Would you have him to be God? He is so. Would you have him suffer all that you ought to suffer? He has done so. Would you have him invested with glory that he may perfect in you the work which he has begun? He is so. Inquire of God himself what *ought* to be done: search the Scriptures from one end to the other: see what the prophets spake: see what our Lord himself spake: and then try if you can find one thing omitted which has not been already accomplished, or is not accomplishing at this moment. Rejoice, then, Believer, rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, rejoice. You may be at present suffering like our Lord, and may be ready to doubt whether you shall ever behold the face of your God in peace: but "the word of the Lord is tried," and "the Promises are sure to all the Seed." Soon you shall be with your exalted Lord, and, having suffered with him awhile, shall eternally be glorified together.]

DCCXCIII.

BLESSEDNESS OF COMMUNION WITH CHRIST.

Luke xxiv. 32. *And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?*

THE Divine authority of the Christian religion
was

was chiefly to be proved by the resurrection of Christ. Hence our Lord gave his Disciples the most unquestionable evidence of his resurrection during the space of forty days previous to his ascension to heaven. After several other manifestations of himself to different Disciples on the day of his resurrection, he entered into conversation with two of them on their way to Emmaus: under the appearance of a stranger, he then expounded to them all the most important parts of the Mosaic and prophetic writings, and shewed them, that there was no just reason for them to be so disconcerted by his death, or so incredulous about his resurrection, since their own Scriptures had so clearly declared that the Messiah should die and rise again. Arriving at Emmaus, he accepted their invitation to abide with them at the house whither they were going: and at supper, he took the bread, and implored the Divine blessing upon it, and brake it, and gave it to them, just as he had been wont to do in former times. *Now* their eyes were opened; and in this unexpected guest they recognized their Lord and Master. It pleased him however, for wise and gracious reasons, to withdraw himself suddenly from them, and to leave them to make their own reflections upon all that had passed. Accordingly, no sooner had they recovered their surprise, than they addressed one another in the words of our text, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

This kind of appearance, and this mode of communicating instruction, were peculiar to the occasion, and must be looked for no more: Christ is personally gone into heaven, where he will abide till the time of the restitution of all things. But we must not therefore imagine that all intercourse has ceased between himself and his people; for he will still, in a spiritual way, maintain communion with them, and give them such discoveries of himself, as shall cause their “hearts to burn within them.”

In confirmation of this truth, we shall shew,

I. That

I. That communion with Christ is yet the privilege of his believing people—

Whilst we disclaim all idea of visions, and impulses, and wild enthusiastic conceits, we do affirm that Christ will yet “manifest himself unto his people, as he does not unto the world:”

1. In the private duties of the closet—

[Christ has said to his Church, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” This is to be understood, not of his corporeal, but spiritual, presence; according to what St. Paul prayed for in behalf of Timothy, “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit^a.” *In reading the Scriptures*, he will, by his Holy Spirit, cast a light upon the Scriptures, as he did in this exposition which he gave to the Disciples; fixing our attention upon those ‘points which are of primary importance, and “opening our understandings to understand them^b.” He will give us that spiritual discernment which is necessary for a right perception of their import^c; and will so impress them on our hearts as to make them effectual for all the purposes of his grace^d. Sometimes he will cause his word to distil as the-dew, or to descend as the rain and snow, which fall not to the earth in vain^e; and at other times he will cause it to pierce as a sword^f, or to burn like fire, or, like a hammer, to break the rocky heart in pieces^g.

In prayer also will he give “boldness and access with confidence by faith in him^h.” His Holy Spirit will “help our infirmities and teach us what to pray for as we ought,” and “make intercession in us with groans which cannot be utteredⁱ.” He “will draw nigh to us whilst we draw nigh to him^k,” he “will hear us and answer us,” and say, “Here I am^l,” he will also impart to us the things we pray for, and give us “grace sufficient” for every occasion that can arise^m. Thousands can yet attest the truth of these things: they have gone to his throne of grace weak, dejected, disconsolate; and have lost all their burthen there, and come away filled “with joy and peace in believing.”]

2. In the public ordinances of religion—

[Our Lord has particularly promised, that “where two or three are met together in his name, there he will be in the midst

^a 2 Tim. iv. 22.

^c 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^a Deut. xxxii. 2. Isai. lv. 10, 11.

^a Jer. xxiii. 29.

^l Rom. viii. 26.

^l Isai. lviii. 9.

^b Luke xxiv. 45.

^d Acts xvi. 14.

^f Heb. iv. 12.

^h Eph. iii. 12.

^k Jam. iv. 8.

^m 2 Cor. xii. 9.

midst of them^a." In the public assemblies of his people therefore he will assuredly be present. Indeed it is his presence there which alone makes them effectual for the end designed: and "if he go not up with us, it is to little purpose that we go" thither. "It is he who gives energy to the word preached: "though Paul should plant, or Apollos water, it is he only that gives the increase^o." Ministers are merely the instruments whereby God communicates his blessings to the Church. Good is then done, and sinners are converted to God, when the power of the Lord is present to work, and when the word comes to their hearts, "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance^p." Hence it is that persons, who but a little time before "knew not that the Lord God was in that place," are constrained to cry out, "This is none other but the House of God, this is the gate of heaven^q."] "

3. In the common offices of life—

[There is no time, no place, where the Lord Jesus will not vouchsafe his presence to those who call upon him. In a crowd, in the midst of business, no less than in the retired and lonely walk, will our Lord be with them^r: he will even be as "their shade upon their right hand^s," to keep them from all evil, and to load them with his richest benefits: "his goodness and mercy shall follow them;" yea, "he himself will walk with them, and dwell in them," so that in every possible situation they shall be enabled to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ^t." How often has this been realized in social converse, and in the chambers of the sick! — — —]

If this be the privilege of his people, it will be said,
II. That it is the most exalted privilege they can possibly enjoy—

There is no satisfaction that a human Being can possess, that is at all to be compared with that which arises from communion with his God and Saviour. The pleasure it affords is,

1. The most refined—

[That which is usually called pleasure, is, for the most part, unworthy of the name: the gratifications of sense are suited only to our animal nature, and enjoyed only in common with the beasts. Even intellectual pleasures, though more suited to us as rational Beings, are yet far below the desires which

^a Matt. xviii. 20.

^o 1 Cor. iii. 5—7.

^p 1 Thes. i. 5.

^q Gen. xxviii. 16, 17.

^r Gen. xxviii. 15.

^s Ps. cxxi. 4—8.

^t 1 John i. 3.

which we feel, and the capacities with which we are endowed. The Christian is "made partaker of a Divine nature;" and he can be satisfied with nothing less than the enjoyment of the Divinity himself. Accordingly this is his actual attainment. The Spirit of God inspires him with a lively hope^a, and "a peace that passeth all understanding;" and so reveals and "glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ" in his soul^x, as to make him "rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified^y." Yes, the joy that he imparts, is such as disembodied spirits may be supposed to feel, an earnest and a foretaste of heaven itself^z.]

2. The most independent—

[For all other pleasures we are dependent either on outward circumstances, or on the state of our own minds. If, for instance, we are racked with pain, or bowed down with grief, or standing on the brink of the grave, no earthly thing will afford us any comfort. Not so the pleasure of which we are speaking: that is even advanced by the want of other things, and never is enjoyed with so rich a zest, as when it has nothing to aid, but every thing to counteract, it. Then it is that the excellency of communion with Christ appears in its true colours — — —]

3. The most ennobling—

[Earthly pleasures prevent, for the most part, the ascent of the soul towards heaven — — — but communion with Christ raises the soul to heaven, and transforms it by constantly progressive changes into the Divine image^a — — —]

4. The most diffusive—

[Other pleasures we are content to enjoy alone: but *this* no one ever tasted, without instantly feeling in his soul a desire to impart it to those around him. "Come unto me, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul." "Draw *me*," says the Church, "and *we* will run after thee^b;" for no one that is drawn would ever willingly come alone; he would, if possible, draw all others along with him — — —]

Some QUESTIONS, which may possibly arise in the minds of those who desire communion with Christ, we shall now endeavour to answer—

1. How are we to attain it?

[It is not to be sought for in the circles of gaiety or in the

^a 1 Peter i. 3.

^x Gal. i. 16. John xvi. 14.

^y 1 Pet. i. 8. The Greek.

^z Eph. i. 13, 14.

^a 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^b Cant. i. 4.

the cares of business, but in reading the word of God and prayer. We are aware, that all persons cannot devote to these exercises an equal portion of their time: nor is it necessary that they should: but all *may*, and *must*, devote some portion of their time to this great pursuit. God has given us six days for worldly labour, and requires the seventh to be sanctified to him: and if that day were conscientiously consecrated to the Lord, we should not long be unacquainted with the subject before us: "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost," would soon be known to us by sweet experience. "Search the Scriptures," says our Lord; "for they are they that testify of me." Again, "He spake a parable, to teach us that we should pray always, and not faint." These are the occupations in which we should take delight: and like the Apostles in their way to Emmaus, we should make the great mysteries of Redemption a subject of our deepest research, and of our most familiar converse. Were we thus to seek after Christ, we should soon have the veil removed from our eyes; and he would "shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ."]

2. How are we to distinguish it?

[I grant that there are enthusiasts, who pretend to such impulses, and such communications as the Scriptures do not warrant us to expect: and it is certainly desirable to be on our guard that we be not led astray by them. But we must not despise those manifestations which God does vouchsafe to his people, because there are enthusiasts who profess to have experienced more. We do not reject good coin because a spurious coin is sometimes obtruded in its stead: but we learn to distinguish between them. So in reference to the subject before us, we should "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good."

We apprehend then that the genuine experience of communion with Christ may be distinguished from enthusiastic pretensions to it, both by its rise, and its operation on the mind. Enthusiasts found their pretensions on some visions, or dreams, or on the word of God coming in a peculiar manner to their minds; and they are filled with pride, and conceit, and an unhallowed presumptuous confidence, which are certain indications of spiritual delusion. The true Child of God, on the contrary, is humbled in the dust by the favours vouchsafed to his soul: he prostrates himself like Abraham and Moses^c, and covers his face with his mantle, as Elijah^d, and abhors himself, like Job, in dust and ashes^e. Nor is he hasty to talk

^c Gen. xvii. 3. Exod. xxxiv. 8.

^d 1 Kin. xix. 13.

^e Job xl. 4. & xlii. 5, 6.

talk of these manifestations: he will strive indeed to bring others to similar enjoyments; but he will not be forward to boast of his own: and the confidence which they create within him renders him tenfold more watchful against every occasion of sin. By such marks as these it will not be difficult for an humble person to judge; but such is the blinding efficacy of pride and vanity, that it is little less than a miracle if an enthusiast be ever brought to try himself by them.]

3. How to improve them?

We know of no better advice than that of St. Paul, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption." God is a jealous God. There are no bounds to his love to those who truly honour him and walk circumspectly before him; "He will rejoice over them to do them good:" but if we presume upon his favour, and give way to any sin, we may soon provoke him to withdraw from us. What God himself then said to his people respecting the Angel of the Covenant, whom he sent to bring them into the land of Canaan, I would say to you; "Beware of him, and obey his voice; provoke him not: for he will not pardon your transgressions." Merciful as he is towards repenting sinners, he will not endure any secret abomination in the hearts of his believing people; and if he behold any, he will hide his face from them till it be put away. If then he has made and sealed you for his own, be careful to "glorify him in your body and in your spirit, which are his."]

^f Exod. xxiii. 20, 21.

DCCXCIV.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

Luke xxiv. 33, 34. *And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed.*

AMONG the various proofs of the truth of Christianity, that which arises from the credibility of the witnesses is by no means the least: nor is their credibility established by any thing more than by their backwardness to believe the resurrection of Christ, upon which the whole of Christianity is founded. They had been repeatedly informed by our Lord, that he should die, and rise again on the third day; yet upon his death they were totally confounded and disconsolate. Two of them conversing together in their way to Emmaus, were overtaken
by

by a person whom they knew not, but who was none other than Jesus himself. He inquired into the subject of their conversation : upon which they told him what expectations they had once formed concerning their deceased Master ; they once thought that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel ; but now their hopes were at an end. They had heard indeed that he was risen that morning from the grave ; that certain women who were of their company had seen a vision of angels, who testified that he was alive ; that moreover some others had gone to the sepulchre, and found that it was even so as the women had said : but yet they could not credit these reports. After their conference, Jesus discovered himself to *them*, as he had already done to many others : by this they were convinced ; and, notwithstanding the day was far spent, instead of staying, as they had intended, at Emmaus, they returned that same hour to Jerusalem, that they might acquaint the other Disciples with these joyful tidings, and bear their testimony to the truth of the things which had been reported. And when they came to Jerusalem, they found the Eleven gathered together, and others assembled with them, all overcome by the weight of evidence, and full of this wonderful event ; and heard them saying one to another, " The Lord is risen indeed."

From these words we shall take occasion to consider,

The importance of Christ's Resurrection ;

The proofs of it ; and

The uses we should make of it.

I. The importance of Christ's Resurrection—

St. Paul, instructing his beloved Timothy what to do and teach, particularly gives him this advice, " Remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead." It was necessary that he should remember the resurrection of Christ, on many accounts ; partly for his own comfort, because all his hopes of salvation were founded on it ; but principally, that by endeavouring to establish this point, he might convince the ignorant and confirm the enlightened. Whatever else he might omit, it was necessary that he should insist much on this, because it was a doctrine of the utmost importance : For,

First,

First, If Jesus was not risen, *he was an impostor*.—Our Lord, in his discourses, had frequently foretold his resurrection: sometimes he reminded his hearers of the prophet Jonas, who, as a type of him, was three days and three nights in the belly of a whale: at other times he declared it in still plainer terms; “Destroy this Temple (viz. his own body), and in three days I will raise it up again:” and to his Disciples he said repeatedly, that he must be crucified, and on the third day he would rise again. Now, though his Disciples understood none of these things, yet there was evidently, amongst his enemies, some expectation of his resurrection; because they made sure the sepulchre, sealed the stone, and set a guard to prevent it, or at least to prevent his being stolen away; that so, by ascertaining that he was not risen, they might prove him a deceiver. And, had he not risen, they had accomplished their utmost wishes: they had detected him in deluding his followers, and thereby discovered him to be an impostor. But by rising according to his own word, he manifested that he was no impostor; but, as the Apostle says, he declared himself to be the Son of God, “with power by his resurrection from the dead.”

Again: If Jesus rose not, *the Apostles were false witnesses*.—It was the grand truth which they were to establish; for when another Apostle was to be chosen in the place of Judas, the traitor, they were to “take one who had accompanied them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day wherein he was taken up from them, that he might be *ordained a witness, with them, of His resurrection*.” Accordingly, they “went everywhere, giving witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” When some among the Corinthian Church denied the resurrection of the dead, Paul proved it from the resurrection of Christ; and that again he proved by the most undeniable arguments: and then he very justly added, “If Christ be not risen, we are found false-witnesses of God.”

Again: If Christ be not risen, *the Gospel is an imposition*.—The very ground-work of all the Gospel is, the resurrection

resurrection of Christ; "that he died for our offences, and was raised again for our justification;" for as his death was necessary, because he had undertaken to pay our debt, so his resurrection was also necessary, to shew that he had fully discharged it: if therefore he be not risen, all preaching of the Gospel, all credit given to it, and all hope of deliverance through him, is vain; and this is what the Apostle himself has said, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

Again: If Christ be not risen, *the Old Testament is also false*—It is said, "He rose again according to the Scriptures:" His resurrection was typified, perhaps in the exaltation of Joseph from the prison to the government of the Egyptian kingdom; probably also in the live bird which was dipped in the blood of one that had been sacrificed and let loose into the air: there can be little doubt but that Isaac's restoration, as it were, from the dead, was intended to prefigure it; and it is absolutely certain, that Jonas was a type of Christ in that particular: *that* type, therefore, must be fulfilled in Christ, or else it was false. It had also been *foretold* by David; "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption:" by this passage the apostle Peter, in his first Sermon, convinces three thousand of the Jews that Jesus was to rise: and indeed it intimates the time of his continuance in the grave; for in Judea bodies began to corrupt on the fourth day; so that he must rise before that time, because he was to see no corruption. Thus the Old Testament, as well as the New, must be false, if Christ be not risen.

But further: If Christ be not risen, we, notwithstanding we be Believers in Christ, are yet *laden with the guilt of all our sins*—By believing in Christ, we profess to be delivered from condemnation and to be cleansed from the guilt of all sin: but it has already appeared, that if Christ be not risen, he is a deceiver, his Apostles are false witnesses, the Gospel is an imposition, and the Old Testament itself is false: so that we must of necessity be under the guilt of our sins as much as ever, unless we can be delivered from it, by crediting what is not true. And this is what the Apostle has also said, "If Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins."

I add once more: If Christ be not risen, *there neither is nor ever will be so much as one person in heaven*—All those eminent saints that we suppose to have been exalted to heaven, died in the faith of Christ; of Christ, who *should* come; or of Christ, who *did* come. They themselves disclaimed every other hope but through Christ; and if they were deceived by him, woe be to them; for the Apostle testifies, “If Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins; then *they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished*,” so that not one of them is saved, if Christ be not risen.

We see then of what importance the doctrine of the Resurrection is! for if it be not true, Christ is an impostor—The Apostles are false-witnesses—The Gospel is an imposition—(and consequently the Apostle’s preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain)—moreover, ye are yet in your sins—and all the saints that have ever lived have perished. Surely a doctrine of such importance ought to be well considered, and unquestionably proved. I proceed therefore,

II. To the proofs of this doctrine—

Time will not allow us to enter into a large discussion of this point; nor indeed is it as necessary for *us* to do so, as it was for the Apostles; for the minds of men in these days are open to conviction, whereas *they* had to combat with all the prejudices of those who put him to death. A few proofs therefore may suffice. We will prove it then,

First; From the testimony of *angels*—At the sepulchre of our Lord there appeared, both to the women and to others, a vision of angels, who told them that he was risen, saying, “He is not here but is risen; come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

Next; From the testimony of *friends*—He appeared to many, and ate and drank with them at different times after he rose from the dead: He suffered them to handle his body, to put their fingers into the print of the nails, and to thrust their hand into his side. And the very incredulity of all his Disciples, and especially of Thomas, convinces us, that they would not have believed it without the fullest evidence. He moreover
appeared

appeared to above five hundred Brethren at once, and in the presence of them all was taken up into heaven.

Next; From the testimony of *enemies*—Where did the Apostles begin to preach Christ? At Jerusalem, the very place where he had been crucified; and that too within a few days after his death: and so clearly did they prove, that he who had been crucified was risen from the dead, that in the first sermon three thousand of his enemies were converted and became his followers. Paul declared, that the greater part of the five hundred who had seen his ascension, were then alive: now, if it had not been true, it must have been strange that so many should enter into such a conspiracy, from which they could derive no advantage, and which would most probably expose them to persecutions and death: and it must be a miracle indeed if neither fear nor interest had induced some one or other of them to discover the cheat, particularly since there was one traitor even among the Twelve Apostles. But the very falsehood which the enemies framed on this occasion, was a testimony in favour of what they endeavoured to disprove. They said, “His Disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept:” now this was the most absurd falsehood that ever was contrived; it confutes itself; for it might be asked, “If you were *not* asleep, Why did you suffer them to take him away? and if you *were* asleep, How could you tell that they did take him?”

The last testimony shall be from *God himself*—Jesus had said, that after his ascension to his Father, he would send down the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and that the Father also would send the Spirit in his name. Accordingly on the day of Pentecost, God poured out the Spirit upon the Disciples, and immediately after upon great numbers of his enemies, and thereby bore the strongest testimony both to the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Here then are the united testimonies of *Angels*, of *Friends*, of *Enemies*, and of *God himself*: if these be not sufficient, further arguments would be multiplied to no purpose.

We come then,

III. To set before you the uses which we should make of this doctrine—

Doctrines are of no value any further than they have a practical effect: in order therefore to improve that which has been now established, permit me to point out in two or three particulars the uses which we are taught to make of it.

We should, in the first place, consider the resurrection of Christ *as a pledge of our resurrection*.—In the Old Testament the resurrection of the body was but obscurely intimated; but in the New Testament it is clearly revealed. Whatever difficulties may appear to arise from the innumerable changes which our bodies shall have undergone, He who first created us out of nothing knows how to reunite our scattered atoms; and with him all things are possible. Moreover he has assured us, that he will do so: He has told us, that this frame of ours, which is sown in the earth a weak, corrupt, dishonoured body, shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory. Of this the Resurrection of Christ is a pledge; for the Apostle says, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.” The first-fruits were a sheaf taken from the field, and waved before the Lord as the appointed means of obtaining his blessings upon the whole harvest: so we, by virtue of Christ’s Resurrection, and through the favour which he has procured for us, shall in due time be raised, and “our vile body shall be made like unto his glorious body.” Let us remember therefore, that this life is only a state of probation for another; and that, though our mortal part sleep for a little season in the dust, “the hour is coming,” as our Lord expressly tells us, “when all that are in the graves shall hear *his* voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.”

Another use which we should make of Christ’s Resurrection is, to consider it as *a pattern of our life*.—In this view the holy Scriptures frequently represent it: St. Paul tells us, that “We must be planted in the likeness of Christ’s resurrection;” that “like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,

Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life:" and again he says, "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him; for in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God: likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Thus plainly is his Resurrection proposed to us as a pattern for our life; and this it should be, in the source, the manner, and the end of it. As to the *source* of his resurrection, it was by the glorious power and operation of the Father: It is by the same Divine Power that we must be quickened from our death in trespasses and sins: that same Spirit which re-animated his body must restore our souls to life. As to the *manner* of his resurrection, it was irresistible; the stone, the seal, the guard were all in vain. So must we break through every obstacle that might detain us in the ways of sin. No desire of man's applause, no regard to worldly interests, no delight in sensual indulgence, must keep us from following the steps of our Divine Master. As to the *end* of his resurrection, he rose, that he might "live unto God:" and such must be our life on earth; we must live unto God in a state of holy communion with him, making his word our rule, his glory our aim, and his service the joy and delight of our souls: nor is there any doubt, but that a life, thus begun in this world, will issue, like Christ's, in a life of endless happiness and glory.

The last use of his resurrection which I propose to mention, is, that *we should make it the ground of our hope*.—Our salvation is most generally ascribed to the death of Christ; but sometimes also to his resurrection: and when St. Paul mentions them as joint grounds of our hope, he seems to lay the greater stress upon his resurrection; "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again." Nor is this without reason; for, by means of his resurrection, *he is enabled to execute his priestly office*: the High Priest under the Law was not only to slay the sacrifice, but to carry its blood within the veil, to sprinkle it before the mercy-seat, and to cover the mercy-seat with a cloud of incense: and this, as the Author to the Hebrews informs us, Jesus is
now

now doing : he has offered himself a Sacrifice for our sins, and now he is entered into the highest heavens with his own blood, and ever liveth to make intercession for us. By his resurrection also, *we are assured, that God has accepted his sacrifice on our behalf* : for if it had not been accepted in this view, Christ must have deceived his followers, and God must have countenanced that deception, by giving the author of it such a signal testimony of his approbation : and as God would not have done this, we may look to him now with confidence as a reconciled Father : and we are fully warranted to do so, because St. Peter has said, that “ God raised up Jesus from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.” We are further assured by the resurrection of Christ, that *he has all power committed to him in heaven and in earth*, and is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him : and therefore St. Peter says again, that “ we are begotten to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” But that particular consideration, which above all renders the resurrection of Christ a ground of hope, is, that *he rose, as he died, not in a private capacity, but as the Head and Representative of all his people* ; on which account we are said to be “ risen in him,” and to be now “ sitting with him in heavenly places.” However therefore the members of his mystical body upon earth may be still contending with the enemies of their salvation, they may rejoice in an assured expectation of victory through Christ their Head : they may already triumph in the thought, that the guilt of their sin is expiated ; that God is reconciled ; that the hosts of hell are vanquished ; that heaven is opened ; that grace is promised ; and that glory is reserved for them at their departure hence. Who then would not hope in this exalted Saviour, especially when we are so expressly told that he rose again for our justification ?

Seeing then that his resurrection enables him to execute his priestly office ; seeing it assures us that his sacrifice is accepted for us ; seeing it is the means of his being invested with almighty power ; and seeing that by means of it his whole mystical body is risen and exalted with him, happy shall we be, if He be our hope
and

and our confidence: but if He be not, we must be entirely hopeless and undone for ever; for there neither is nor can be any other ground of hope: we may have the faith of Abraham, the repentance of David, the self-denial of John the Baptist, the knowledge of the Apostles, and the fidelity of Stephen; yet all in vain: if Christ be not risen, all this will profit us nothing; we must inevitably perish notwithstanding all; for thus says the Apostle, in a fore-cited passage, "If Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins; then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished:" so that Abraham, David, John the Baptist, the first martyr, Stephen, yea and all the Apostles, are perished, if Christ be not risen. If then these words of St. Paul be true, we see the pernicious tendency of their doctrine, who would persuade us to renounce our dependence upon Christ, and to rely on our own works as the ground of our hope. What! are we better than those saints of old? Or would it avail us any thing if we were? No: we might be possessed of every virtue that ever adorned a human Being, and in the highest degree that it ever appeared in a fallen creature, and perish at last, if we made any thing but Christ the ground of our hope. Let us look then to this exalted Saviour: let us regard his resurrection as *the pledge of our resurrection, the pattern of our life, and the ground of our hope*; and then we may adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle; "Who is he that shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again."

DCCXCV.

THE GOSPEL TO BE FIRST PREACHED AT JERUSALEM.

Luke xxiv. 46, 47. *Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations in his name, beginning at Jerusalem.*

THE Apostles were to be Christ's chosen witnesses respecting all that he had said, and done, and suffered

suffered in the world. To qualify them for this office, he gave them all needful instruction, not only whilst he sojourned openly among men, but in the interval between his resurrection and ascension. He opened to them more particularly the principal types and prophecies that related to him, and “then opened their understandings also that they might understand them:” and thus, by exhibiting the Gospel more fully to their view, and strengthening their organs of vision to behold them, he prepared them for the Ministry which they were now speedily to undertake.

The necessity of the death and resurrection of Christ we have before considered*. We now fix our attention on the direction which he gave them,

I. To preach the Gospel to all nations—

The Gospel comprehends two points; “repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”—

[Repentance is unknown to the Law: *that* says, ‘Do this, and live;’ and in the event of transgression, denounces a curse against us^b. Whatever there was of repentance enjoined by Moses and the Prophets, it was altogether from a respect to that Sacrifice which was in due time to be offered for the sins of men. That it is an evangelical duty, appears from its comprehending the substance of John’s preaching^c, and of Christ himself^d, and of the Apostles also, both at, and after, the day of Pentecost^e——and to bring men to it, was the end for which Christ died and rose again. This therefore must be preached as an essential part of the Gospel.

“Remission of sins” also is a distinguishing feature of the Gospel of Christ: it is indeed the glory of the Gospel, that it makes provision for our attainment of that blessing. Not that the remission of sins is bestowed on *account of* our repentance: repentance prepares the mind for a due reception of it; but it is for the sake of Christ only that it is bestowed: and therefore in our preaching we must particularly mark, that this mercy is the purchase of his blood, and the gift of his grace.]

These are to be preached to all nations—

[The blessings of the Mosaic dispensation were confined to the House of Israel; but those of the Gospel are to be extended

* On ver. 26.

^b Gal. iii. 10.

^c Matt. iii. 2.

^d Matt. iv. 17.

^e Acts ii. 38. & iii. 19. & xvii. 30.

795.] GOSPEL FIRST PREACHED AT JERUSALEM. 729

extended to all mankind. They are equally *necessary* for all, *free* for all, *effectual* for all: there is not a human being that does not need to repent and seek remission of sins in the name of Christ; for "there is no other name but his, whereby any man can be saved"—nor is any person excluded from these mercies, if he do not himself thrust them away from him; for "the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him"—nor shall any have reason to complain that they are not sufficient for him; for "all that believe are justified from all things"—Hence the offer of them must be made to all; "we must go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."]

Our Lord however enjoined his Apostles,

II. To begin their Ministration of it at Jerusalem—

It had been foretold that "the Law should go forth from Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." But there were also important reasons in our Lord's mind, why his Gospel should in the first instance be published there. It would be eminently useful,

1. To confirm his truth—

[If the Apostles had left Jerusalem, and gone at once to the Heathen, it would have appeared as if they had despaired of succeeding where their testimony might be inquired into, and were practising an imposition on those who were unable to contradict them. Thus the Gospel would have been universally regarded as "a cunningly-devised fable." But by beginning at the very place where their Master was crucified, and bearing their testimony respecting his resurrection, in the very place where he had been put to death, and before the people who were most interested in controverting their statements; and being enabled too to confirm their word with signs and miracles; being successful also in convincing hundreds and thousands that Christ was indeed risen, and was the only Saviour of the world; all this carried such conviction along with it, that even to this hour the enemies of Christianity are confounded by it, nor can find any reasonable plea for doubting what is so firmly and incontrovertibly established ———]

2. To magnify his mercy—

[When we reflect on all the miracles that Christ had wrought in support of his assertions, and what indignities had been offered to him by all ranks and orders of people at Jerusalem,

salem, and at last what a cruel death they had inflicted on him; we might well expect that he should exclude that murderous city from any share of his mercy. He might well have said to his Disciples, Go and "preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations;" but come not near Jerusalem, that wicked city, that has filled up the measure of its iniquities in the murder of its Messiah. But instead of laying any such injunction on them, he commands them to be peculiarly mindful of that city, and to begin their Ministrations there: so that, if they should have access to the Priests, who demanded sentence against him, or to any of the people, who, in the various ways, by mockings, by scourgings, by nailing him to the cross, by piercing him with the spear, executed it upon him, they might declare to them his readiness to forgive all their trespasses, and, by the blood he had shed, to cleanse them from the guilt of shedding it. What wonderful mercy was here! James and John, upon a small provocation that was offered him, would have called down fire from heaven to consume a whole village: but their Lord, after having sustained the utmost injuries that ingenious cruelty could inflict, was anxious only for the salvation of the persons that had inflicted them. Here was mercy, such as none but God could exercise¹.]

3. To encourage sinners to the end of time—

[It is common with men, when convinced of sin, to despond, as if they had sinned beyond the reach of mercy: the advantages they have lost, the favours they have abused, the iniquities they have committed, seem to form such a load of guilt, as can never be removed from their souls. But who ever lost more advantages, or abused more favours, or committed greater iniquities, than they who "crucified the Lord of glory?" Yet *they* were the *first* objects of our Redeemer's pity and compassion. So then shall it be with all who truly desire to find acceptance with him: "Where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" even as Paul "obtained mercy, that in him, as the very chief of sinners, God might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."]

To IMPROVE this subject, we would intreat you,

1. To embrace this salvation—

["To you is the word of this salvation sent;" and as Ambassadors from Christ, we beseech you to receive it with all thankfulness. Nor think it an hard matter to repent, and flee to Christ, when the remission of your sins is suspended on it, and shall be insured by it———O let not Christ shed his

¹ Hos. xi. 8, 9.

his blood in vain; nor us, as his Ministers, commend to you his grace in vain! — — —]

2. To imitate this example—

[Do you admire this unbounded love of Christ to sinners? Know that, in this, “he has left you an example, that you should follow his steps.” You have been greatly injured perhaps by a fellow-creature: return not then the injury; but render good for evil, and blessing for cursing. This is to tread in the steps of Christ, and to approve yourselves his true disciples. “If your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: and labour to heap coals of fire on his head,” to melt him into love. “Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.”]

DCCXCVI.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

Luke xxiv. 50—53. *And he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*

AMIDST the various proofs given by our Lord to his Disciples respecting his Messianicship, there was one of pre-eminent authority, namely, the ascending up to heaven in their immediate presence. He had not risen in their presence, because his frequent appearances to them for the space of forty days after his resurrection would be a sufficient evidence to them that he had risen: but if, in his ascent to heaven, he had withdrawn privately, they would not have known whither he was gone; since they could not go up thither to obtain a personal interview with him, or to ascertain the truth of his ascension. Hence our blessed Lord, having accomplished all that was necessary to be done on earth, led them out to Mount Olivet, and went up from the midst of them to heaven, giving them ocular demonstration that his removal from them was such as he had taught them to expect: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world:

world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father^a."

In the account here given us by St. Luke, we notice two things;

I. Our Lord's departure from his Disciples—

"Having loved his own, he loved them to the end;" and expressed his love to them most particularly in the very instant of his departure: "He lifted up his hands, and blessed them:" and it was in this very act that he was taken up from them; "While he blessed them, he was parted from them." Now his removal in the midst of this act ought not to be passed over as a mere accidental and uninteresting occurrence: it surely may be considered as intimating to us,

1. What was his *object in coming into the world*—

[We are told by St. Peter, that "God sent him to bless us^b." Man was cursed, as a transgressor of God's law: nor could he, by any means, remove the curse or obtain any blessing whatever. Sin interposed an insurmountable obstacle in his way. But Jesus undertook to remove this obstacle: to expiate the guilt of sin by the sacrifice of himself, and thus to open a way for man's reconciliation with his offended God. This sacrifice he had now offered, and had "finished the work which God had given him to do." Now therefore he authoritatively pronounced his Disciples blessed: blessed, as believing in his name; blessed, as interested in his death; blessed, as committed to his protection; and blessed, as fellow-heirs of his glory. Just as the High Priest, after offering his sacrifice, was to bless the people^c, so now Jesus intimated that the end of his incarnation was accomplished, and that, as our Great High Priest, he was empowered to bless his people with all spiritual and eternal blessings^d.]

2. What should be his *occupation when he was departed from it*—

[He was not now going to relinquish their concerns: on the contrary, he would still be as mindful of them as ever. He was going to heaven upon their business; "as their fore-runner," "to prepare places for them;" "to make continual intercession for them;" to take on himself the management of the universe for them; and to receive a fulness of all gifts and graces for them, that "they might receive out of it" according to their several necessities. His removal, though it

inter-

^a John xvi. 28.

^b Acts iii. 26.

^c Lev. ix. 22.

^d Gen. xiv. 18—20.

interrupted the sight of his person, and the hearing of his voice, should not interrupt the communication of his blessings: He would still load his Disciples with the richest blessings, and “not *them* only, but also all who should believe in him through their word:” and, if we now look to him with the eye of faith, we may behold him, as it were, at this very instant occupied as he was at the moment of his departure from the world: he is still blessing his believing people: “having received gifts for men, he is daily and hourly bestowing them, even on the most rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell among them^e.” Yea, he will yet further extend his favours to the remotest corners of the earth: for “in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed^f.”]

If we look only to the past history, we shall be surprised at,

II. The effect it produced upon them—

When our Lord had told *them* of his intended departure, they were “filled with sorrow;” but now that he was really gone, they were as full of joy: but they were *now* better instructed in the nature of his kingdom than they had been before. Indeed even to the last they retained some expectation of a temporal kingdom^g: but his departure from them effectually dissipated that delusion; and taught them to look up to him for far higher blessings.

Now the effect which was produced in *them* by the *sight* of his ascension, ought equally to be wrought in *us* by the *recollection* of it. We therefore should,

1. Adore him—

[He is worthy of all adoration: nor can we doubt but that the “worship” paid to him by his Disciples, was such as they paid to Jehovah himself. The prayer which they almost immediately afterwards offered up to heaven for the appointment of a successor to Judas, was addressed to Him^h, just as Stephen’s afterwards was, at the very time that he beheld the Father himself sitting on his throneⁱ. Let us then adore Him as our incarnate God: and remember that, in so doing, we most truly and acceptably serve our heavenly Father^k.]

2. Re-

^e Ps. lxxviii. 18.

^g Acts i. 6, 7.

ⁱ Acts vii. 59, 60.

^f Gen. xii. 3. Ps. lxxii. 17.

^h Acts i. 24.

^k John v. 22, 23. Phil. ii. 9—14.

2. Rejoice in him—

[Who can contemplate Him seated on his throne of glory, and constituted “Head over all things to his Church,” and not rejoice in him? We are commanded to “rejoice in him always¹,” such joy is the characteristic mark of all his people^m: and it ought to be as elevated and as fervent, as our feeble nature will admit ofⁿ. If the Apostles, notwithstanding they were bereft of his bodily presence, and were as yet but partially acquainted with the benefits that were to result from his ascension, “returned to Jerusalem with great joy,” much more should we, to whom the full extent of those benefits is opened, “rejoice with exceeding great joy.” Let Israel then “rejoice in him that redeemed him; let the Children of Zion be joyful in their King^o.”]

3. Consecrate ourselves to him—

[The Apostles from this time appear to have given themselves up wholly to the exercises of devotion. This was right in their peculiar circumstances; but was not intended as a precedent for us. We have civil and social duties that call for our attention, and which must on no account be neglected. Yet, as far as relates to the affections of the soul, we must consecrate ourselves as entirely to God, as they. We should be “sanctified wholly to the Lord, in body, soul, and spirit^p.” He has “bought us with a price; therefore we should glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his^q.” Let us then serve him *in his Temple* at the appointed seasons of public worship; and let us serve him *in our closets*, where no eye seeth us but his.]

4. Wait for the accomplishment of all his promises—

[Our Lord had promised to his Disciples, that “they should in the space of a few days be baptized with the Holy Ghost; and had told them to wait at Jerusalem for that gift^r. At Jerusalem therefore they waited in expectation of the promised blessing. And have we no promises to be fulfilled to us? Has he not given us “exceeding great and precious promises,” comprehending every thing that we can desire for body or for soul, for time or for eternity? Let us then wait for the accomplishment of them to our souls. In due time “Jesus will come again from heaven in like manner as he went to heaven: and then will that last promise be fulfilled, “I will
come

¹ Phil. iv. 4.

^m Phil. iii. 3.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 8.

^o Ps. cxlix. 2.

^p 1 Thess. v. 23.

^q 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^r ver. 49. & Acts i. 4, 5.

796.]

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

come again and take you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." Oh, that he may then find us with "our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, and ourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord!"

END OF VOL. VII.

LONDON:

Printed by R. Watts, Crown Court, Temple Bar.



00110975

